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BROADWAY SERIES

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Through Pain to Peace

BY

Sarah Doudney

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THROUGH PAIN TO PEACE

THROUGH PAIN TO PEACE

A Novel

BY

SARAH DOUDNEY

AUTHOR OF

"A WOMAN'S GLORY," "THE MISSING RUBIES," "GODIVA
DURLEIGH," ETC.

40
Broadway
Period

"What I have, I see as in the distance; and what is gone becomes
a reality to me."—FAUST.



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THROUGH PAIN TO PEACE.

CHAPTER I.

TRACY'S KNIGHT.

“Life may be given in many ways,
And loyalty to Truth be sealed
As bravely in the closet as the field.”

—LOWELL.

“MISS TRACY!”

The voice came ringing faintly into the dim room where a girl of twelve was talking to herself in the dusk. Dim as it was there, the last light of the autumn day was still resting on a picture which hung near one of the windows, and Tracy stood gazing at it with tears in her solemn dark eyes.

She was a slim, Italian-looking child, with a pale little face set in a cloud of wavy hair as black as night. Over her plain frock and holland apron she had twisted a scarlet scarf with deep golden fringes; and on her head was a sky-blue silk hand-kerchief, arranged to look something like a coiffe. Thus bedecked, she stood before the picture with many wavings of her slender hands, saying over and over again the same words in a soft, sweet tone.

“My knight; my very own knight! Tender and true, tender and true, tender and true.”

“Miss Tracy!” the voice called again.

"My knight," the child went on, "I love you; I shall always love you. But—you died."

"Miss Tracy!"

The voice was close to the door now; so close that it forced itself upon the child's ears, and rudely broke into her dream. Instantly a change passed over the pensive little face, swift as a lightning flash, and Tracy turned all at once into a small raging vixen. When Barbara, flushed and spent with toiling up long flights of stairs, came panting into the room, she was confronted by a little fury, performing a fantastic war-dance, and breathing out threatenings that were appalling to hear.

"Do hush now, Miss Tracy," said the young woman, pressing her hand on her side. "It's quite awful to hear you going on. All my breath is gone, and I—good gracious, miss, you've been at your sister's drawers! That's her best scarf, all twisted up; and that's her blue handkerchief on your wicked little head! Take 'em off at once, directly, before more harm comes of it."

With that lightning swiftness which characterized all her movements, Tracy tore off scarf and head-gear, and flung them at Barbara with all her force. The maid, finding herself stung smartly in the face, waxed wrathful.

"I believe you're possessed, Miss Tracy, that I do!" she cried. "It's for no good that you come up here, all by yourself, talking and murmuring to them that no one can see. It makes me creep all over when I listen to you. And to go and dress yourself up, and get a-play-acting when no one's looking on, is a sort of thing which only a witch would do."

"How dare you call me a witch?" demanded Tracy, with a new burst of fury. "Supposing I were to make a waxen image of you, and stick it full of pins," she added, making little stabs in the air, and tossing about her arms with a quaint and sin-

gular grace which fascinated even the prosaic mind of the housemaid.

"If your temper wasn't so awful, it would be quite pretty to see you in your tantrums, miss," she said meditatively.

But, swift as thought, Tracy changed again. The elfish dancer had fled, and in her stead came a delicate princess, drawing up her slight figure to its full height, and speaking in the calm, level accents of one accustomed to be obeyed.

"Go downstairs, Barbara," said this regal young person; and Barbara went at once.

Left to herself, Tracy went back again to the picture, and recommenced her soft murmuring in a sorrowful tone.

"My knight," she said, "I never talk to any one save you; and sometimes I think that your spirit hears. It was wrong to fly into a temper because that silly woman provoked me. What does *she* know about you and me, and all that we have to say to each other? What does any one know? It's all a dream, dear, and you'll never come out of the picture and stand before me a real person, will you? You died ever so long ago, and only common men are left in the world."

She turned away with a deep sigh, and went slowly down the darkening stairs, a shadowy little figure gliding among the shadows of the quiet house.

It had been raining nearly all day, but at evening time it was light, and there were touches of faint glory in the west. A thin mist hung over the old town, and towers and spires, wrapped in its folds, looked stately and tall, and seemed to belong to a city of dreams. Tracy paused at a narrow window on the landing, and thought of the picture upstairs—that picture which was so often in her mind when it was not in her sight. Even in the last glow of the autumn sunset she could see the form of her dying knight, his deep eyes looking up to the face

of the fair queen who bent over him. Tracy did not care much about the queen, and her romantic history of loves and woes; all her interest was centered in this man who had devoted himself with such unswerving loyalty to her cause. It was the tenderness and truth and fidelity that had won the child's heart, and made this idolized Douglas the hero of her young life. And perhaps it was the melancholy conviction that she should never meet him out of the realms of dreamland which overspread her face with such an earnest thoughtfulness, and gave her eyes their peculiar expression of pathos and seeking.

Down in her prim drawing-room Mrs. Taunton was sitting with her tea-tray before her, waiting for her young granddaughter. The room was lighted rather dimly by a single lamp with a rose-colored shade, and its soft light made the apartment seem prettier than it really was. Tracy entered slowly, gliding in with noiseless step and drooping head; and her grandmother asked her anxiously if she were quite well.

"Yes, quite well, thank you," Tracy answered in a weary tone. "Only very, very tired."

"Tired! My dear child, what have you been doing to tire yourself?"

"I haven't tired myself, grandma; I never do. It's life that tires me, that's all."

"The idea is too absurd," said Mrs. Taunton, pouring out tea. "At twelve you have not borne the burden of life long enough to find it wearisome, Wait until you are four times twelve, and then you may say that life tires you indeed."

"Four times twelve," repeated Tracy, taking a slice of cake from a silver basket, "four times twelve are forty-eight. I don't know my multiplication table very well, but I think that's right. I hate figures! I hope I shan't go on living, and multiplying twelve too many times; that would be simply awful, you know, grandma."

"It is simply awful to hear you talk," said Mrs. Taunton, setting down the teapot with a sigh. "Why are you not like other children of your age? When Laura was twelve she never made any of these extraordinary remarks."

"Do you really want me to be like Laura was?" inquired Tracy, raising her dark eyebrows. "I'm afraid that's impossible, grandma. Laura must have been a commonplace little girl. I'd do anything to please you, but I can't be commonplace."

"Laura was not as troublesome as you are," replied Mrs. Taunton, sighing again. "I always knew exactly what she would do and say. Now you are so different; you are always doing and saying unexpected things."

"That's why I'm so interesting," said Tracy, with much self-satisfaction. "The other day I heard Mr. Lazelle say, 'What an interesting child Tracy is!'"

"Very foolish to let you hear him," Mrs. Taunton said tartly.

The door opened as the words escaped her lips, and Mr. Lazelle's homely face, crowned with white hair, suddenly appeared in the room.

There was a vein of kindly humor in Mr. Lazelle's composition which endeared him to every one who knew him; and there was no one who did not know him in Ferngate. He had been rector there for thirty years; and every child in the old town was familiar with that venerable face and portly figure, and had felt the kind touch of his hand upon its head. The rector loved children, and had the gift of making friends of them. When he called them, they came; when he spoke, they listened; they could not have told why they liked him (children, as a rule, are not fond of giving reasons); but it was certain that he could win their confidence without an effort; and, having won it, he never lost it. At the sight of him Tracy brightened visibly. He was a staunch ally of hers; one of the few per-

sons who understood the seeming contradictions of her complex nature, and made excuses for those peculiarities which grandma and Laura found so trying. She almost hoped that he had overheard Mrs. Taunton's hasty words, and was mischievously pleased with the old lady's look of confusion. But Mr. Lazelle, if he had heard them, did not mind them in the least. He was a sweet-tempered man, perfectly aware that he had secured the affection of his people, and quite untroubled by the ordinary little worries of a parson's life. This placidity was due, perhaps, to the fact that he was free from clerical vanity. It did not hurt him to hear other men's sermons praised, for he always thought and spoke of himself as a poor preacher; it did not exasperate him when his brethren were promoted to bishoprics and deaneries, for he had never coveted preferment. He took life simply, and lived cheerfully and soberly, thus escaping a good many of its burdens and perplexities.

"I am always sure of a seat at your tea-table," he said, sinking down comfortably into an arm-chair by Mrs. Taunton's side. "How is it that you contrive to impart an old-world flavor to your tea? When I drink it I am carried back to the days of funny short waists and piled-up hair."

"The china gives the flavor," Tracy assured him gravely. "I'm so used to it now, that I forget to notice it. Don't you know how very old these cups are, Mr. Lazelle? Grandma's grandmother used them on her wedding day; they were set out in an arbor between the clipped yews, and everybody said that they were 'vastly pretty.' Great-great-great-grandmother was a 'monstrous fine girl,' and had plenty of beaux. I made a sketch of her the other day."

"There is no portrait of my grandmother," Mrs. Taunton explained; "Tracy is making believe, as usual."

"It was a fancy portrait, of course," said the rector, with an indulgent glance at the girl. "I should like to see it. Tracy's sketches are very good."

"But they never satisfy me," Tracy exclaimed. "I never can make the pictures match my fancies. The face in my mind isn't a bit like the face that comes out on the paper. That's my trouble always."

"A very old trouble," said the rector. "You began to strive after the ideal early in life, Tracy. I wonder if you will give up the quest later on, and be satisfied with the best that you can get?"

She shook her head.

"I'm not easily satisfied, Mr. Lazelle. Grandma would like me better if I was. I am only twelve, I know; but if I lived to be twelve times twelve, I should never find anything so good as the things I've dreamed of. No man that I shall ever see will be worth loving," added Tracy with a solemn air of conviction. Mrs. Taunton's cap-ribbons quivered; she was seriously annoyed. The rector, highly amused, sank back in his chair and watched the little speaker.

"Go on, Tracy," he said. "Tell us why all the men will seem so worthless? Have you found a hero in your dreams?"

"I've found him in a picture," Tracy answered, very gravely. "A picture that grandma didn't care for, and hung up in the spare room out of sight."

"It is so dismal," Mrs. Taunton interposed; "Mary Stuart mourning over the dying Douglas after the battle of Langside. I never could endure pictures of that kind. They suggest such melancholy thoughts, don't they, Mr. Lazelle? They remind one that a good deal of life's best blood has been wasted, and always will be wasted. I don't like to look at a dying hero."

"Why, grandma, you wouldn't have had him live?" Tracy cried. "That would have spoiled everything."

"Oh, child, how absurdly romantic you are! Why should he not have lived, and fought afterward in a better cause?" Mrs. Taunton demanded.

The rector, watching Tracy intently, saw that she was struggling with that difficulty of expression which so often silences the young, and gives many a seeming triumph to their elders. He came to her assistance, speaking in a quiet voice.

"A French writer has told us that 'there is something wanting to the perfect life which does not finish on the field of battle, the scaffold, or in prison.' This is the feeling that Tracy wants to put into words," he said. "As you were saying, Mrs. Taunton, a good deal of life's best blood is wasted—apparently wasted. A true knight breaks many lances, and some of them are sure to be broken in a wrong cause."

"You don't think that the good lance dignifies the wrong cause, do you?" Mrs. Taunton asked.

"No; if a cause is poor, it can't be helped by any borrowed dignity. But a man's sincerity and purity may atone individually for his mistakes."

"Well," said the old lady, filling his cup again, "I can't talk as well as you do; and if I could, Tracy wouldn't listen to me. But I don't want her to grow up with silly notions in her head, prepared to undervalue any sensible man she meets, because he is not a bit like that knight of hers. I wish you would take her in hand, Mr. Lazelle."

He laughed a little at grandma's earnestness. Tracy sat silent, watching him with expectant eyes.

"In my calling," he said, after a pause, "I have met a great many knights; but not one of them has ever drawn a sword. A hundred times I have wished that I was a great poet who could put their noble deeds into grand verse, and give them to the world. You will lose sight of a good deal of heroism, Tracy, if you only look for it in the past. The true knightly spirit is transmitted from age to age: it never dies

out. Did you think it was only a Douglas who could be tender and true? My child, there is many a working-man who has the best of claims to that old motto. Do not under-estimate the manhood of to-day because it is not clad in armor; don't under-rate the humanity around you. Touch it, let your own soul blend with it, and you will discover its nobility for yourself."

It was not often that Mr. Lazelle made a long speech. Having said what was required of him, he sought an excuse to go, and turned to Mrs. Taunton to speak about a sick choir-boy. Then he went his way; and the old woman and the little girl sat together in silence.

Presently, the door opened again, and some one came in hurriedly, with a sweep and a rush. She wore an ample cloak which floated about her, and enveloped a flower-stand in its folds, nearly overturning grandma's pet geranium. The rose-colored lamplight deepened the rose flush on her face, and showed that it was healthy and young.

"How dreadfully quiet you are!" she said. "Is there any tea to be had? I have had a long drive alone, and I want to be revived."

CHAPTER II.

LAURA'S BRIDEGRoOM.

“Somewhere or other there must surely be
The face not seen, the voice not heard,
The heart that not yet—never yet—ah me!
Made answer to my word.”

THERE was an air of triumph about Laura which Tracy saw at once; and, not being by any means a saintly child, she resented her sister's self-importance.

“I should like to do something to take her down,” Tracy thought. “Why does she come swaggering in like this? Ugh! how flushed her face is! Somebody has been proposing to her, I suppose, and she is puffed up with vanity and gratification. That isn't the right way to receive an offer. She ought to be pale and grave and calm. True love is such a solemn thing: it is for life and for death.”

She lost herself in a waking dream, and forgot Laura of the flushed face altogether for a few seconds. But Laura had no mind to be forgotten on such an important occasion as this. She meant to make the most of her opportunity, and get as many congratulations and felicitations as she could. And then, too, she, in her turn, resented Tracy's dreamy glance and general lack of interest in her doings. Who was Tracy, that she should give herself these airs of cold indifference? She burned to wake up something like envy in that listless-looking child, who seemed to gaze at her without seeing her at all.

"You don't ask if I have any news to tell," she said. "You seem quite dull, grandma, and Tracy looks as if she wanted fresh air. It was delightful to see the little Rodens: they all have cheeks like roses."

"And heads like turnips," Tracy murmured languidly.

"How rude you are, Tracy!" Laura's roses deepened to an unbecoming tint. "When I have been staying with really nice children I feel quite ashamed of my sister."

"So do I," said Tracy, with a faint smile.

"As if there is anything in *me* to be ashamed of! Grandma, will you allow me to be insulted?" Laura cried indignantly.

"My dear, I think you began the attack," Mrs. Taunton confessed. "I am sorry that the Rodens have made you dissatisfied with your own relations."

The old lady was a staunch believer in the sacredness of family ties; moreover, she had a secret preference for the strange, wayward child who provoked and fascinated her by turns, and was deeply offended with Laura for hinting at the superiority of the Rodens over a Taunton. But Laura was a girl who never knew how to withdraw gracefully from dangerous ground; and now, with her usual want of tact, she advanced instead of receding.

"Well, really, grandma, the Rodens are always so bright and cheerful that one doesn't care to leave them. And they introduce one to such nice people!"

"I hope they do. I hope, Laura, that all the people you meet at their house are desirable acquaintances."

This speech was too much for Miss Taunton in her excited state of mind. She had come in prepared to make a sensation, and be regarded as the heroine of the hour; and her grandmother's remark was like a dash of cold water thrown suddenly into her face. Her mouth went down at the corners, her

handkerchief went up to her eyes, and she began to sob aloud.

Child as she was, Tracy was well aware that the fountain of Laura's tears did not lie very deep. There are tears that come from the surface of an excitable nature, and win a great deal more pity than they deserve. Laura was one of those women who weep copiously in public, and suffer little from the effects of their emotion. Yet Tracy, regarding her with a calm scrutiny, was suddenly roused to compassion, and began to take her part. Perhaps, too, the remembrance of a certain crumpled scarf and handkerchief, restored with hasty hands to Laura's drawer, had something to do with her quick desire to console her sister.

"We haven't heard Laura's news yet, grandma," she said. "Do tell us, Laura; I want to hear. We were half asleep when you came in, and we ought to be roused, you know."

"Oh, there's n—nothing w—worth hearing," sobbed Laura, looking up with fiercely colored cheeks. "It's only that I'm—engaged, that's all."

"Well, that's worth hearing, isn't it, grandma?" Tracy cried, with genuine satisfaction. "I was afraid that he had only paid marked attention. Of course, I don't know who the 'he' is, but I do hope he's good enough to be my brother-in-law."

"And my grandson," added grandma gravely. "Laura, you are only twenty. He ought to have spoken to me first."

"He couldn't help it," answered Laura, firing up again, and forgetting to cry. "He was too much in love to wait. If he hadn't spoken he would have exploded. You don't understand him, grandma."

"No, I don't understand explosives, my dear; they are not in my line at all. As yet you have only referred to him as 'he.' May one ask what his name is?"

"Dawley—Frank Dawley."

"It's an ugly name; it might almost as well have been Dawdle," said Tracy. "Never mind, Laura; I don't mean to be unkind. You will have a lovely wedding, and all Ferngate will turn out to see the show. I think I shall look nice as a bridesmaid with my dark hair flowing. I shall be pensive—yes, I will be pensive that day."

"You are always thinking about yourself," exclaimed the future bride, with just indignation. "And this is the way in which my news is received! I'm glad Frank doesn't know; I shall never tell him. He is so warm-hearted that—that he would say you were a couple of cold, unfeeling things. And so you are!"

"And so we are!" echoed Tracy, like the chorus in a comic opera. "Dear Laura, I'm so sorry. I see myself and grandma from your point of view, and I am convinced that we are brutes. Forgive us, and we'll promise to receive Frank with open arms."

"Promise for yourself," said grandma, leaning back in her chair with great dignity. "Sit down, Tracy. You are only twelve, and your forward conduct disgusts me. I am not a brute, but I have had a lover who afterward became my husband; and I know exactly what a courtship ought to be. This affair is all out of order. I always thought that no good would come of those visits to the Rodens."

"O grandma, you are not going to break off the engagement!" cried Tracy in dismay. "I was just picturing the wedding beautifully. It would be such a dreadful disappointment to Laura and me. And she may not get another lover if you send Mr. Dawdle—O Laura, I mean Dawley—away. Laura is so pink, you know; and some men prefer pale girls like me. My dear, dear grandma, I entreat you not to be stern. May Our Lady soften your hard heart!"

Mrs. Taunton was never so near boxing her favorite's ears as when that irrepressible child knelt in

a dramatic attitude by her side. The mixture of jest and earnest in Tracy's manner was exasperating to her friends in their serious moments. She was never insincere, but it was impossible to tell where feeling ended and fun began. Steeped as she was in the pages of Scott, it was quite a common thing for her to express herself in language that might have befitted the Middle Ages; and grandma, being a staunch Protestant, was horrified to hear her grandchild calling upon saints to defend her from imaginary dangers, and swearing by the Mass.

"Get up, Tracy," said the old lady pettishly. "My head is quite confused. When I was young, girls always regarded a betrothal with the utmost seriousness. They did not come rushing into their homes with the announcement that they were engaged."

"No one could have been more serious than Laura," expostulated Tracy. "She made her announcement with tears. What more do you require, grandma? There are times when you are fearfully exacting, you know. I'll get up, of course, as you request me to do so; but I shall continue my supplications."

And she was as good as her word, never ceasing to wring her hands at grandma across the table, until Mrs. Taunton was maddened into shaking a lady-like fist in return. Laura, meanwhile, had recovered her composure, and was ready to assume an air of dignified defiance.

"Mr. Dawley is coming to talk to you to-morrow, grandma," she said. "I hope you will be prepared to receive him as my future husband. You must know that I'm not to be turned against the man I love by a few hasty speeches."

Here Tracy, who had been thrown into an ecstasy of amusement at the sight of grandma's fist, became suddenly grave. Those words—"the man I love"—had a sobering influence over her wild spirit. Perhaps Frank Dawley was a real knight, tender and

true, ready to prove his royalty by dying, if needs be, at his lady's feet. Anyhow, love was not a thing to be trifled with, she thought; and so she slipped noiselessly away out of the lamplighted room, and went to the narrow window on the landing to meditate, and look up at the stars.

The mist had cleared away; one planet, large and luminous, hung like a lamp above the dark church-tower, and the old town seemed to be at rest in the stillness of the autumn evening. A low breeze was stirring softly in the thick ivy that wreathed the window, and it came breathing into Tracy's face like a sigh. She began to wonder where this wind had been wandering before it found her here. Had it been blowing across lonely fields, where once strong men like Douglas, had fought and died? What secrets it could whisper to ears that were opened to its soft revealings! Perhaps it had come straight from the spirit-world, charged with greetings from the souls at rest to those still toiling on the path of life. Tracy always encouraged thoughts like these. She liked to believe that the seen and the unseen are very near together.

Left to themselves, Mrs. Taunton and her elder granddaughter speedily arrived at an understanding. Tracy's well-meant attempts to promote peace had utterly failed; but when she was gone, both felt that a disturbing influence had departed. Laura explained that her Frank had three hundred a year and expectations, not to mention a cottage of respectable size, in which a couple with a modest income could live in lowly comfort. Grandma thought she might have done better, of course; and then admitted to herself that Laura really was not a particularly attractive girl. Coming down from her stilts, she promised, graciously enough, to receive Mr. Dawley with all due courtesy and cordiality; and if Laura really did think of being married soon—she would gladly give her all possible help and countenance.

Mr. Dawley called on the next day, and sat in the rector's favorite chair at the tea-table. Tracy honestly wanted to be very fond of him; but none the less did she feel his total unlikeness to her ideal knight. In fact, it would be difficult to imagine any one less like a knight than Laura's Frank. He was short, stout, and florid, and even more nervous than a man usually is in his unhappy circumstances. Of all the terrible ordeals of life, an introduction to the family circle of one's future wife is, perhaps, the worst. But, oddly enough, it was Tracy who contrived to mitigate the sufferings of the new-comer; and she won his eternal gratitude by affording him some minutes of amusement and ease. She talked to him with all the grace and tact of a skilled woman of the world, deftly avoiding difficult subjects, lightly putting grandma into the background whenever the old lady advanced her old-fashioned notions, and carefully including Laura in the conversation. Dawley thought he had never seen a happier home circle, and said so to his betrothed.

"And, by George! that little sister of yours is charming," he added warmly. "She'll be turning no end of heads one of these days. Fellows like to be amused, you see; and she's got such pretty ways."

"Has she?" said Laura, in unaffected astonishment. "Why, Frank, I was afraid you wouldn't like her. One never knows what she will be; she is five or six different persons in the course of one day."

"Full of surprises, eh, like a pantomime? Well, that's rather fun, you know."

"Yes; only Tracy's surprises are not always pleasant," said Laura curtly. "But, anyhow, Frank, I'm glad that you have seen her at her best."

To do Tracy justice, it must be recorded of her that she continued to be at her best all through the period of Laura's brief engagement. Her sister had never liked her so well before; she developed such

unexpected gifts in the needlework line, and gave really valuable suggestions about bonnets and gowns. If Laura fell into a difficulty concerning a bodice or a skirt, Tracy would retire to the spare room upstairs, think over the matter alone, cover several sheets of paper with sketches of imaginary brides, and then come down radiant and full of useful ideas.

"How the child improves!" grandma would say with proud satisfaction. "I can see the results of my good training at last."

Mr. Lazelle listened to these remarks with a benign smile. He did not believe that grandma's excellent training had done as much for Tracy as was supposed. The girl had grown up in a wild-flower way; following out her own fancies, throwing out tendrils in all directions; clasping some things closely, and letting others go. She had, indeed, been left too much to her own devices. Mrs. Taunton was a woman of quiet tastes, given to sitting silently over needlework, and caring very little for society. She did not like the ceaseless noise and movement of children around her, and so Tracy had never had many playmates of her own age, and had been thrown back upon the company of dream companions. Miss Butler, the quiet daily governess, who came and went, had never really won the heart of her wayward pupil, although Tracy accorded her all due respect and liking, and learned from her readily enough.

It was a memorable day in the Taunton household when the wedding dresses came home. When Laura, blushing in white satin and tulle, had been sufficiently criticised and admired, Tracy arrayed herself in the bridesmaid's costume in the spare room. There, in solitude, she posed before the picture of the knight, calling on him to look at these soft pale blue folds which invested her little figure with a new dignity. And then, as usual, she forgot herself and her finery, and gave up her thoughts to this

shadowy hero who reigned supreme over her dream of life.

"Will you never come to me, Douglas?" she asked. "Are you waiting somewhere out in the world till I come? No matter where you are, nor how you are dressed, I shall know you! and I shall find you tender and true!"

Laura's wedding was a quiet affair, but it attracted quite a crowd of sight-seers, and the old parish church was filled from end to end. The bride, with her full face and figure, looked something like a pink peony seen through a gauzy mist; and the bridesmaid, slender, graceful, and dark-haired, had the air of a captive princess whose thoughts were far away in some distant land of flowers and sunshine. Without her, the bridal would have been simply commonplace. Her quaint, half-foreign charm imparted a touch of poetry to a prosaic scene.

As Laura acknowledged afterward, Tracy really behaved well to the last. She did all the things that a little sister is supposed to do at a wedding, and did them with an inimitable grace. Frank, as red and dewy-faced a bridegroom as ever drank more champagne than was good for him, kissed his hand to her demonstratively as she stood at the gate of the court-yard to watch the departure of the wedded pair. They were not, by any means, a romantic couple; but, in years that followed, one picture was always clearly imprinted on the memories of both. At any moment of their lives they could call up a vision of that slim figure in the pale blue dress, waving a dainty hand as she stood in the December sunshine, her soft hair blown about her like a dark cloud.

The carriage drove away; the hall door closed, and Tracy went back to her dreams.

CHAPTER III.

WATER-LILIES.

“Through light and shadow thou dost range
Sudden glances, sweet and strange;
Delicious spites and darling angers,
And airy forms of flitting change.”

—TENNYSON.

“WHEN a woman is twenty-one,” said Tracy in a serious voice, “it is good for her to take a solitary walk, and muse over all her shortcomings.”

“I hope the walk won’t be too long.” Mrs. Taunton looked up from her knitting with a shade of anxiety on her placid old face. “You are not very strong, Tracy.”

“Stronger than most people,” the girl answered. “Much stronger than Laura, who always catches every new disease that is spoken of in her hearing.”

“Laura has never had anything the matter with her,” said grandma impatiently. “It is very absurd to see such a big, rosy creature pretending to have delicate lungs and a weak heart. But, Tracy, you are too fragile.”

“Not at all, grandma,” replied Tracy cheerfully. “There is enough body to hold my spirit, and that is all that a reasonable person requires. Now I must be off, for I want to get to Woodcourt.”

“To Woodcourt?” Mrs. Taunton repeated. “Have you heard that the new baronet is coming home? Barbara told me so.”

“Barbara makes up stories to amuse you, grandma. You know that none of the Montjoys have lived

there for more than twenty years," said Tracy, buttoning her gloves. "No; they will leave Woodcourt to its silence and desolation. The palace of the Sleeping Princess was scarcely less disturbed. It always soothes me to go and look at the dreamy old place."

It was early in a June afternoon when Tracy Taunton, now a woman grown, set out upon this birthday walk of hers. She went swiftly through the High Street of the old town, never pausing to look into a shop-window, for even the bookseller's establishment failed to win more than a passing glance. Only once did she stop just in front of the west door of the old church. A little child, its golden head uncovered, was dancing all by itself in the shadow of the Gothic porch, moving its small pattering feet to the music of its pretty treble voice. Tracy lingered and looked with a smile on her lips—a smile that transfigured her grave young face, and revealed an unexpected dimple which came and vanished in an instant. Then she went on out of the street, beyond the suburban cottages and gardens, and across a flowery meadow where the narrow footpath wound like a ribbon through the long grass.

At last the path straggled away from the meadow, and lost itself on the short, sweet turf of a wide common. Here the fragrant air came sweeping down from those low hill-ranges which looked so faint and far away; and Tracy stood still to feel the wind's kiss. Life seemed to her an ineffable gift at that moment. It was a good thing to be twenty-one, and live in a world where there were sweet, wandering breezes; great beds of uncultivated flowers, spreading out a carpet of purple and gold; and hills whose calm outlines suggested thoughts of fairer things beyond. Just then she was saying good-by to analysis, and feeling only that life was worth living. A bird was singing high up in the blue; a pile of snowy clouds hung motionless over Sir

Alfred Montjoy's woods: above, as well as below, this summer world was filled with joy and peace.

There was a gypsy encampment on the skirt of the woods; and Tracy, as she passed it, looked smilingly at a brown-faced boy at play upon the grass. Then she went on, plunging fearlessly into the deep shadows, and emerging at length into a glade where there was a view which had long been dear to her eyes. From this spot she could see the old Tudor mansion, its many windows twinkling in the sun, and its far-reaching gardens bathed in the glory of the June day. When you came nearer you could perceive certain traces of neglect about the silent place, but its decay was beautiful. Mosses faded in the sunshine; wild poppies made a gaudy show among the crumbling stones; over every bit of ancient wall hung an entanglement of many-tinted foliage. Not a single human being was in sight; no footsteps echoed on the gray flags of the long terrace; no hands gathered the roses piled in pink and creamy masses over the portal; no eyes watched the lovely shades that shone and shifted on the peacock's purple breast. It always seemed to Tracy as if the fairies of long ago had flitted back here again, and (for some elfish reason unrevealed to man) had laid this sleepy Woodcourt under a potent spell.

If Mrs. Taunton had known that her grandchild meant to celebrate her one-and-twentieth birthday by committing a crime, there would have been an end of her peace. But although she had seen the girl setting off with a large rush basket on her arm, she had no suspicions of the dreadful truth. A good deal of the old wilful spirit lurked in Tracy still, and she rather liked the thought of stealing something. Moreover, she was an artist; and all things are fair in art, as in love or war.

For days and days she had been haunted by a vision of the cool, dark lake at Woodcourt, with the lily-cups floating on its lazy bosom. As Shawondasee

pined for the prairie dandelion, so did Tracy long for these water-lilies; but she had cunningly concealed her intentions from the household at home. They all knew that she was in the habit of wandering away to Woodcourt in summer-time; but no one guessed that she had found out a gap in a certain bit of mouldering wall, and had already effected a stealthy entrance into the silent old gardens more than once. Barbara would have betrayed the secret to Mrs. Taunton if Tracy had confided in her; but the young lady's childish knowledge of Barbara had made her discreet; and not even Mr. Lazelle would have believed his favorite capable of the guilty deed which she had come out to do this day.

"At last I shall know what stealing feels like," thought Tracy, trampling valiantly through a maze of dog-roses and hazel boughs, and pausing in triumph at that broken bit of masonry which not one of the Montjoy's retainers had ever thought it worth his while to mend. "At last I shall do something which will brand me with the name of felon. Oh, how sweet it is here! They must be a foolish race —those Montjoys—to neglect such a place."

She had come, by a crooked path, to the margin of the still water, clear golden-brown in the afternoon sun. A little way from the brink grew a great cluster of turquoise forget-me-nots, and the tall iris reared its lovely purple head among the spear-like rushes; but the lilies were farther out on the pool, There they lay in calm summer majesty, ivory chalices and big bronze buds, looking fairer even than Tracy had seen them in her dreams. How she wanted them! How impossible it would be to go back without them!

No sign of humanity was anywhere to be seen. She walked fearlessly now along the water's edge, looking with covetous eyes on the treasures that lay beyond her reach. All the best seemed to be resting on a vast carpet of broad leaves, close to a little

island, where the russet walls and thatched roof of a hut could be distinguished through gaps in the dense foliage. A sedgy odor prevailed, mingled with the peculiar *patchouli* scent of rotting leaves and reeds; but now and again came a breath from the syringas and roses. Tracy strolled on, and then suddenly came to a full stop with a little cry of delight.

A small boat of very ancient aspect lay close under the shade of some dipping willow boughs. She stepped down carefully, holding fast to the trunk of the friendly willow, saw that it held a couple of decaying oars, and instantly decided that Providence, or some kind kelpie, had provided it for her special use. Miss Taunton was a person who acted on the spur of impulse. Without a moment's hesitation she set her dainty foot in this frail bark, found that it did not crumble into dust as might have been expected, and then seated herself, and took the rotten old oars in her hands. Just a few strokes out to that carpet of leaves, and back again. A child could do as much as this without the slightest danger!

The lily madness seemed to grow upon her as she pulled away from shore. She would not leave the lake till her rush basket was as full as it would hold; she would even make a second expedition to-morrow.

Nothing could be easier or safer than crime under such favorable circumstances. And what a delicious wickedness it was! Gliding across this still water, you felt as if you had discovered the Lotus-eater's paradise; the quietness was so intense, and the warm air was so heavily laden with summer scents, that the realities of daily life seemed faint and far away. And then, too, the coloring of the scene was beautiful to artistic eyes; an endless variety of soft green shades, touches of emerald thrown in to brighten the darker foliage; deep shadows of olive-brown; the heavenly blue of forget-me-nots; the creamy white of elder-blossoms. It was a picture to dream over in days to come.

But what was this? She became aware that something cold was crawling all over her feet; and a shivery dread came creeping up to her heart, almost stopping its happy throbs. She was here, quite alone upon this silent lake, between the island and the shore; and the miserable old boat was fast filling with water.

“What is the good of screaming?” She asked herself the question with the quietness of utter despair. There was no one near enough to hear the loudest cry that she could raise. All around the birds kept up their summer melody, and insects buzzed and hummed a sleepy tune; but a human voice would have been a sweeter sound. It was all her own fault, of course; she had wilfully come to meet her doom in these romantic solitudes, and it was more than likely that grandma would never succeed in recovering her body. Poor grandma! How placid she had looked, settling herself on the couch for her afternoon doze!

Then she began to wonder how long one would be in drowning? This cool brown water, with its floating flowers, was dreadful in its beauty now. What secrets were hiding in those unfathomed depths. Shadowy forms seemed to glide in and out among the rushes on the banks; in a vague way she felt that they were only phantoms, but she must cry to them for aid. One shriek, and she was sinking down, down, and clutching vainly at the broad lily leaves. And then came a great, overwhelming darkness, and ended all.

CHAPTER IV.

RESCUED.

“As a twig trembles which a bird
Lights on to sing, then leaves unbent,
So is my memory thrilled and stirred:
I only know she came and went.”

—LOWELL.

THE return to consciousness after fainting for the first time is a wonderful moment. Tracy, opening her eyes at last, could scarcely believe that she had awakened in the old familiar every-day world. She was cold, very cold; and some one was bending over her, rubbing her chill hands, but she lay silently on the wet grass, lost in the endeavor to recover the link which had snapped, the link that bound her to common life. Still feeling after her missing memory, she found herself lifted up, and then a cup was held to her lips.

“You must drink this,” said a clear, imperious voice.

Instinctively she obeyed the command, and was revived, the full power of remembrance came back, and strength increased as she moved, and drew in breaths of fresh air. Where was she? Lying on the flowery bank of the little island, with the blue sky smiling overhead, and the birds singing their summer songs. The dear, pleasant old earth was still her dwelling-place; it was her birthday, she was twenty-one; she had come to Woodcourt to steal water-lilies, and had nearly perished in the attempt.

Some one had seen her drowning, and had jumped into the lake to save her.

"I can move now," she said, in a tone which sounded absurdly meek and small.

"Not just yet," he answered firmly. "In a minute or two."

Tracy shut her eyes again and reflected.

She was feeling very wet and miserable, and as heartily disgusted with herself as it was possible for a proud young woman to be. By and by, this man, whoever he was, would expect her to account for her presence on the lake, and how could she reply to a series of embarrassing questions? He did not look like a keeper or a gardener, nor did he speak as either of those functionaries would have spoken. Probably he was some one employed by the Montjoys to look round the old place, and see that it was not going utterly and entirely to decay. She opened her eyes once more, and this time she was steadfastly resolved to keep them open.

"I have to thank you for saving my life," she said, in a voice that was more like her own, looking frankly at her preserver.

Somewhere in a picture gallery she had once seen a portrait, painted in his youth, of Claverhouse of Dundee; and the face of this stranger, young, melancholy, and proud, was the very prototype of his who ended a sanguinary career in the wild pass of Killiecrankie. It is, according to Hazlitt, a bad proof of a man's character to refer to his face; but that early picture of "Dark John of the battles" does not, as some have fancied, give the lie to all the stories told of his barbarous cruelty. Study the countenance well, and you will see, in the calm *hauteur* of those features, the pride that defies heaven, and the indifference that despises hell, such a heaven and such a hell as men used to make for themselves in that wild time.

With sudden swiftness the remembrance of that

face flashed upon Tracy as she raised her head and spoke her thanks. The young man bowed slightly, and the faintest gleam of amusement was visible in his melancholy eyes.

"Why did you get into that rotten old boat?" he asked, after a moment's pause. "It was a risky thing to do. The lake is pretty deep in some places, they tell me."

The moment for confession had come; there was nothing for it but to avow the truth.

"I wanted the water-lilies," she admitted candidly. "I wanted them so much that I crept into the grounds through a gap in the wall. Of course I know I deserve to be punished."

"You are quite sufficiently punished, I should say," he replied. "Do you really feel strong enough to move now? My boat, at any rate, is water tight, and I will row you safely to the shore."

He led the way to a decayed little landing-stage, and she followed him, dripping as she was, down some steps that were slimy with green water-weeds. The lilies had no charm for her now; she looked at them with a shudder as he pulled away from them with long, strong strokes, and felt a thrill of unspeakable relief when she stood, once more, with tottering feet upon the bank. He glanced at her forlorn figure, with the wet folds of a pretty summer gown clinging to the delicate limbs, and thought of his first glimpse of her a little while ago.

For a man who admired material charms only Tracy would not have possessed many attractions. She had the slender, flexible form and peculiar grace of movement which are very seldom found in English girls. Her hair, thick and soft, and rough with natural curliness, was almost jet-black. The complexion which accompanied this hair was white with an under-tint of ivory; and the eyes were of the darkest shade of gray, made darker still by the shadow of long black lashes. Delicate but irregular

features, narrow cheeks, and soft, red lips, rather full, completed a face which was rarely touched with the rose of youth and health. Yet go where she would Tracy was never unnoticed. If you glanced at her, you always wanted to prolong the look. Something picturesque, something poetic and ethereal, gave her a subtle power which was not easy to define.

"You must come indoors at once," he said, noticing that she shivered. "My housekeeper shall take care of you."

His housekeeper! In an instant the truth broke in upon her bewildered mind. It was the master of Woodcourt who had got a thorough wetting for her sake. She had come to steal his flowers, and he had returned good for evil, heaping coals of fire on her head in a way which covered her with confusion. He stood facing her with grave politeness, while little rills of water, trickling off them both, ran down into the grass at their feet.

"Found you at last, Montjoy," said a well-known voice. "I've been hunting all over the grounds."

Tracy turned quickly with an exclamation of relief. And the rector, coming forward, took her clammy little hands into his.

"My child," he said, "this is a dreadful state of things. You must go into the hall, and I'll start off to Mrs. Taunton. Don't begin to talk; you can tell me how it happened afterward."

And so it came to pass that Tracy found herself, a little later, sitting in a dim old chamber. It was quiet and sombre, hung with tapestry on which were depicted faded nymphs dancing heavily, while fat Cupids scattered roses. The windows, many-paned, admitted views of long gravel paths stretching out between ridges of green box, of beds of blazing scarlet and gold, of gray walls ivy-grown. A large oval mirror, in a black oaken frame, reflected a slight figure, draped in the housekeeper's ample

dressing-gown; a great mass of dark hair, beginning to dry, made a deep shadow about the delicate face, which looked pale and spiritual in the gloom. In the background there was a four-post bedstead on which several of the Montjoys had drawn their last breath; and Tracy thought gratefully of her own little white bed at home.

Too many impressions had been crowded into this golden afternoon, and they had left her restless in body and mind. She was not shivering now; all chilly sensations had passed away after, she had partaken of hot tea; and she was sitting here alone, waiting with some impatience for Barbara to arrive with a fresh supply of clothing. Yet there was a charm about the antique room with its quaint hangings and time-worn furniture, and she had never been within these old walls before.

"If I had but come in a more dignified manner!" she said to herself. "Grandma will feel that the Tauntons are humbled forever in the eyes of the Montjoys. Well, I *have* distinguished myself on my twenty-first birthday!"

The room grew dimmer still. The shampooing, received from the housekeeper's trusty hands, had taken effect, and Tracy felt a delicious drowsiness stealing over her. Presently she was fast asleep, and did not wake until Barbara, with a portmanteau, was ushered into the quiet chamber.

"You've nearly killed your grandma, miss," said the maid, tugging viciously at the straps. "Being well stricken in years she can't bear up under these awful shocks. And how are you, miss? Has inflammation of the lungs set in?"

A low rippling laugh answered her. Tracy sat up and shook back the cloud of thick, dark hair.

"What a disagreeable person you are, Barbara!" she remarked affably. "You don't possess an atom of that useful thing called tact. Faithfulness is your strong point, but then you are so unpleasantly

faithful. It is impossible to like you, although I should be sorry to lose you."

"Ah, there are not many like me, miss," said Barbara, conquering the last strap.

"I hope not. It would be too dreadful if the world were peopled with Barbaras. What clothes have you brought? My gray cashmere; ah, it was grandma who thought of that! The old darling has excellent taste," said Tracy, rising with a well-contented air.

The rector had come back from Ferngate with Barbara, and was talking to Sir Alfred in the drawing-room. This was a room which had been modernized to a certain extent; but the effect produced by everyday couches and chairs was not perfectly satisfactory. From the ceiling, a company of flying nymphs and reeling fauns looked down contemptuously upon the prosaic tables and lounges which had nothing to do with their airy, flowery realm. Into this room, which always had a certain air of cheerlessness, came an exquisitely dainty figure in a pale gray gown, very soft in material and simply made. On the dark hair was a little bonnet of cream-colored lace—a mere trifle, set off by a bit of scarlet geranium.

"Have I kept you waiting too long, Mr. Lazelle?" she asked, as she buttoned a tan glove. "You know I cannot go home without you. I really don't feel strong enough to bear the brunt of grandma's anger alone."

"You shall not give Sir Alfred a wrong impression of my old friend," said the rector reprovingly. "Grandma won't be half severe enough. Think of the trouble you have caused, and be humble and penitent."

She lifted up her face, and her deep gray eyes rested on Sir Alfred with a pretty pleading look of apology.

"I am so very sorry that I tried to steal your lilies,"

she said in a soft, level voice. "It was so good of you not to let me be drowned. My grandmother will thank you a great deal better than I can."

She gave him her hand, with a smile both gentle and bright. And then the rector went out with her to the fly that was waiting, and Sir Alfred was left alone in his cheerless drawing-room.

For some minutes after they were gone he still remained standing by the window, just where he had stood when Tracy came in. The room seemed strangely empty and chill; the gay dancers on the ceiling were a set of rollicking idiots; the numerous mirrors reflected his melancholy face with tormenting frequency. At three-and-twenty Alfred Montjoy had little taste for solitude, and he was by no means delighted with his ancestral hall.

He had come to see that Woodcourt was ready for his mother, who was to be his future companion in the old house. His father had been an invalid for years, moving from one health resort to another until his wanderings ended in a German town, and the widow and her son made up their minds to go home at last. Everybody said that the young baronet ought to live at the old place; he, himself, acknowledged that it was the right thing to do. But he had only dim recollections of Woodcourt, and was not prepared for its general air of desolation and decay. His first walk through the grounds gave him a fit of depression which lasted for three days. It would never be possible, he thought, to take any interest in such surroundings as these. He had grown accustomed to the gay panorama of a travelling life; he had seen all that was to be seen abroad, and had followed his own devices, as a young man with a sick father and a mild tutor is pretty sure to do. The late baronet had not inspired his son with very strong affection. Alfred had become so thoroughly used to the sight of Sir Robert in his invalid chair, and so bored with the daily recital of his various

ailments that he had lost the sense of the man's real sufferings.

Alfred Montjoy was one who ought to have been born poor, and made to work hard. There was a good deal of force in him which might have been directed into useful channels; but there were no wise directors around him. What might have been power had degenerated, and was merely passion; his strong will, never opposed, had become simply a stubborn determination to please himself at all cost. His only chance of going right was to love some woman who should guide him; or, at least, teach him that the highest prizes of life are never won by the selfish. Unfortunately, his mother, although she granted all his wishes, had not seriously tried to teach him anything.

He had seen plenty of beautiful women, of course; and his rambling life had given opportunities for free intercourse with all sorts of people. Lady Montjoy was exclusive; but she was not above making use of her pretty girl-friends if they would come and sit with her sick husband, and relieve the tedium of his days and her own. She had never deemed any of these girls worthy of her son, and had been on the watch for any attempts, on their part, to spread snares. But Alfred, gay, unsettled, and very well amused, had not yet given her a really serious cause for uneasiness.

The melancholy expression, which added, as women said, so greatly to the beauty of his face, had come there very early in boyhood. Perhaps it arose from the weariness which always waits on those unhappy persons who get every desire gratified. Perhaps it was inherited from ancestors who had found that "all was vanity." Anyway, it invested Alfred Montjoy with a charm which better men lacked, and made one remember a face which might otherwise have been forgotten.

When he found himself standing alone in the

drawing-room after the departure of his guests, he was surprised at the vivid picture which remained in his mind. He saw Tracy, just as he had first beheld her, seated in the crazy boat; but that vision soon faded, and gave place to the slight, rounded figure in the gray dress, with its air of quiet confidence and distinction. A man who had gone mooning about an old place alone for days might be expected to grow sentimental. Sir Alfred Montjoy was not given to sentiment, as a rule, nor to self-analysis; but it is certain that he began to ask himself, then and there, what it was in Miss Taunton which made him unreasonably anxious to see her again?

To while away the time till dinner, he sauntered out into the grounds again, and some mysterious impulse drew his feet to the margin of the lake. The first sweet breath of evening came creeping across the sheet of still water as he stood there, looking out at the lilies; and the delicate lights and shadows were as beautiful as a dream. Quite suddenly it flashed into his mind that it might be possible to make Woodcourt endurable after all; the place wanted a great deal of brightening up, it was true; but there were spots here and there which ought not to be touched, and this was one of them.

“It shall be left,” he thought, “just as it is.”

CHAPTER V.

BALMY DAYS.

“O June, O June, that we desired so;
Wilt thou not make us happy on this day?
Across the river thy soft breezes blow,
Sweet with the scent of bean-fields far away.”

—W. MORRIS.

“My entrance,” Tracy confessed, “was not all that could be desired. But it cannot be denied, grandma, that I made a dignified exit. It was so thoughtful of you to send the gray cashmere.”

“Think of the impression which you must have produced on the servants,” said grandma dismally.

“There were very few servants to be seen. But, trust me, when I assure you that my appearance in the cashmere effaced all previous impressions. I have always realized intensely the importance of dress and the choice of color in dress. Gray is calm and soft and dove-like; it imparts a Quakerish air to the wearer and makes it difficult to believe that she could descend to frivolity. If I wanted to pose as a sort of earthly angel, I should dress in gray.”

“Your posing came too late,” remarked Mrs. Taunton with a scornful smile. “Yards of dove-colored cashmere will not blind Sir Alfred’s eyes to the fact that you first appeared at Woodcourt in the character of a thief. The thought is unbearable.”

“You make too much of my little sins, grandma,” complained Tracy, pouting.

“No, I don’t,” Mrs. Taunton answered. “Ask

Mr. Lazelle what *he* thinks. This time he does not excuse you."

"Oh, if Mr. Lazelle turns against me, I am lost indeed!" cried Tracy, rising from her seat at the breakfast-table with a despairing gesture. "Life is no longer worth living. The verdict of society is harsh and cruel. The joy of youth has faded like a dream. My one dark hour—my first and only deviation from the path of rectitude—has blotted out the sunshine of existence. It is a pity that somebody doesn't write a tract about me, and utilize me as a public warning." She wrung her hands gracefully, and then paused and turned slowly round to see the full effect of her words. Mrs. Taunton tried not to laugh, then gave way against her will.

"You are always acting, Tracy," she said. But suddenly she felt a trifle uncomfortable, and wondered if there was anything real hidden behind these pretty little absurdities. Tracy was always provoking, always charming, and always inscrutable.

"If Mr. Lazelle has given me up—" the girl began, and stopped short. Barbara had come in carrying a large basket with an important air.

"Sir Alfred Montjoy's compliments, miss, and he has sent you some water-lilies. And he desires to know how you are to-day."

A faint color tinged Tracy's pale cheeks. Mrs. Taunton saw a fleeting look of triumph pass across her face, and then it was calm again.

She turned to grandma when Barbara had shut the door, and asked, in a very quiet voice, if she cared to look at the lilies.

"I am going to take them away upstairs, and make a study of them," she added. "This morning I mean to work very hard, I assure you."

She went away with her flowers, and her grandmother sat and mused. Was it possible that Tracy's mad freak was to produce results of which she had

never dreamed? All that Mr. Lazelle could tell about the young baronet had been already told. The rector had known Sir Robert at Oxford, and they had renewed the acquaintance when they met abroad, getting intimate enough for the invalid to consult the clergyman as to the future of his son. Mr. Lazelle had advised that Alfred should be a soldier; but the lad had no liking for discipline, and declared his intention of going home "one of these days" to become a model landlord. Lady Montjoy, too, was fond of painting fancy pictures of a renovated Woodcourt, and often spoke of her ceaseless longing for a true old English home.

Her dream was about to be realized at last; but what would she say if Sir Alfred should be in haste to present her with a daughter-in-law? No one had ever suspected Mrs. Taunton of possessing extraordinary powers of imagination; yet it is certain that fancy was running away with her this morning. Her breakfast-room, always exquisitely cool and fresh in summer, overlooked a bright little square of garden and a bit of red-brick wall, covered thickly with Virginia creeper and climbing roses; all the flowers that she had watched over with care and pride were in the full glory of their June perfection, but grandma's thoughts were far away from their home-like sweetness.

If—if—if Sir Alfred had fallen under the spell of that curious witchery which Tracy could exert at will! Stranger things had happened, and were happening every day; and, with Mr. Lazelle as a staunch ally, the Tauntons might hope to overcome any of Lady Montjoy's little objections. Naturally she would look higher for her son; but Tracy was a lady, and she might think herself fortunate in getting a daughter-in-law who was of good birth, and graceful and refined. Nowadays, when young men laid their titles at the feet of dancers and music-hall belles, it was a good thing for a mother when

her lad brought home a well-brought-up young gentlewoman as a wife.

While the bees hummed over the flowers, and grandma dreamed her tranquil little dreams, Tracy sat at her easel upstairs, and painted the water-lilies.

She was in the old room in which she had been wont to talk to herself and her shadowy companions years ago. It was a pretty room now, but its prettiness was not the result of luxury, and all its adornments were evidently the outcome of the fancies and devices of the girl who sat in it. Here and there were brightly colored jars and pots of growing fern; unframed pictures—most of them studies of heads and small figures—filled up the spaces between the book-shelves; and above the draped chimney-piece hung the engraving of the dying knight who had been the hero of Tracy's childhood. She had traced his motto in Old English characters on the plain oak frame, and the words were always before her eyes—“Douglas, Douglas, tender and true.” Even now, when she looked up from the water-lilies which would soon bloom afresh on canvas, her glance instinctively sought his face. It was essentially a manly face, dark, strong, and calm, with the supreme peace that comes of finished warfare; and as Tracy gazed on it she thought of another face seen only yesterday. The other was more perfect in feature, younger and sadder, a countenance that had awakened in the girl's heart that slumbering compassion which is, in some women, the beginning of first love.

“Mr. Lazelle said that Sir Alfred had been too much indulged,” she thought. “I think that is a little hard; to me he looks as if he had always wanted something which no one gave. Perhaps his mother did not understand him; perhaps she is a cold woman. One cannot look at that face of his without being sorry that the shadow came there so soon.”

She added a few more touches to the lilies, and paused again, to go off into a dream of the place where they grew. How pleasant it would be to nestle one's feet in the warm leaves and grass by the lake's brink, to see the slender willow-boughs dipping into the water, and to hear the soft sleepy coo of the doves coming faintly from Sir Alfred's dense old woods. It was a sin to stay indoors on a June day; she did not shrink from the sun as fair girls do, but loved to sit with uncovered head, and dark hair rumpled by the breezes. Even her little room, long-loved, was like a prison on a morning like this.

"Losing my time? Well, I suppose I am," she said, in answer to a reproof from an inner voice. "But pictures must be dreamed of before they are painted. And the lilies have taken possession of my fancy to-day; they are drawing my thought away to that still water-home of theirs. I thought at first that I could never love the lake again, but I have forgotten the danger, and can remember only the sweetness now. It was kind to send the lilies."

Yes, it was kind, for it had put Tracy on good terms with herself once more. Behind all her comedy airs there had been a good deal of real annoyance. She had worn her mask gracefully and lightly enough, nevertheless it had hardly veiled the chagrin of a proud girl who was conscious that she had acted foolishly. She could hold her head high again before grandma, and it would be impossible for Mr. Lazelle to be severe any longer. Not that she had quite believed in the kindly rector's severity; it must have been one of grandma's fictions, she thought. But all was well that had ended well.

The summer blooms thickened; the land was full of flowers and song; and the sun shone day after day in such cloudless splendor that men forgot to abuse their native climate, and went out to picnics

and garden-parties with something of the zest of their school-days. Sir Alfred Montjoy was in high good-humor with himself and his surroundings. Sometimes, when he looked back on his first impressions of Woodcourt, he wondered at his own blindness. It was extraordinary that he had not perceived its charms at once, but nothing was worse than an unsettled life; it spoiled a man for the serious business of existence, and gave him false notions about the monotony of home and the tameness of the country. His friends had been right, quite right, when they had urged him to take up his residence at Woodcourt, and he was heartily glad that he had come.

"What a sensible young man he is!" said grandma to Mr. Lazelle, when he had expressed his infinite content in her hearing. "'A contented mind is a continual feast;' but the majority of men are *so* dissatisfied. Really, he is quite an example."

The rector smiled. He knew how easy it was for youth to imagine itself contented, and he saw, too, what it was that had made Woodcourt so beautiful and Ferngate so interesting to Alfred Montjoy.

As the balmy days went on, Alfred's visits grew more and more frequent to the Tauntons. Their house stood a little way out of the High Street of the old town, and was inclosed in a small court-yard, which was brightened by a neat border of box and flowers. The front of the old dwelling had a monastic air of primness and seclusion; but the back windows overlooked that sunny garden which was grandma's pride. It was by no means an extensive piece of ground, but she had managed to crowd into it all the sweets of paradise. Here, on dreamy summer afternoons, Tracy was often to be found.

There were a great many heart-throbs in that old garden. No sooner did Alfred turn his steps away from the place than all his thoughts seemed to concentrate upon it. Once or twice he rebelled against

this impulse, with the natural fear that one feels when a dominant feeling takes hold of one's life. But resistance was never very strong; he always yielded, and strode rapidly through his woods and fields to seek that quiet nook where a girl loitered among her flowers. For the first time he was falling under the spell of a sincere passion, and it possessed him body and soul. He was enthralled by every movement of her slender figure, every glance of the deep eyes, every tiny curl on the little dark head. There was no *ennui* in this love-affair; Tracy had the gift of keeping people amused without an effort; all the charming things that she said were spontaneously uttered; hers was the easy gracefulness of diction which made the hours fly while one listened to her talk. Meanwhile, grandma watched the growing intercourse with silent satisfaction.

One day the rector was lingering over the tea-table with Mrs. Taunton, and glancing, now and again, through the window which opened upon the garden. The young people were there; Tracy, leaning lightly against one of the rustic columns of the little summer-house, was telling some small story with quiet animation. Sir Alfred was drinking in every word with unmistakable delight. It was so clear that he had a quick appreciation of her moods, so evident that no gift or grace of hers was lost upon him, that grandma wondered at Mr. Lazelle's silence. He might, she thought, have expressed a little pleasure in the intimacy which was going on before his eyes.

Was he growing dull or stupid? No; there was a certain alertness in his look which contradicted the half-formed impression. The old lady was fast losing patience with his reserve. She resented it keenly, and resolved to make him speak on the subject that was nearest to her heart.

"Don't you think," she began, with a self-satisfied smile, "that Tracy has found her knight at last?"

"She has found a knight, certainly," he answered in a matter-of-fact tone. "Montjoy would wear her token on his helmet, and break a lance for her with all his heart."

She felt that there was something cold in his manner. "Yes, I see that he is devoted," she said impatiently. "But about Tracy herself. Is he not just the man she has always dreamed of?"

"Tracy is not easily read," he returned gravely. "She is like a river, swift, rippling, sparkling; it does not pause and permit you to look into its depths."

"Well, I have never seen her show the same pleasure in any one else's attentions," said Mrs. Taunton, "and he really is a very handsome fellow. She said the other day that his face reminded her of some old picture. I thought that was a sign that she had been studying him a good deal."

The rector turned and looked intently at his old friend.

"You would like them to come together?" he said.

"I am not a match-maker," grandma replied with dignity. "But Tracy has no home but mine, and I am growing old. It is not strange if I desire to see her in a safe shelter."

"No," said Mr. Lazelle, "no. And Woodcourt seems to you a desirable shelter?"

"Of course it is desirable. I don't make any pretence of utter unworldliness, and it would be a good thing to see the child safely provided for. I do not deny that the position has its advantages; I should like my dear girl to be Lady Montjoy. You are a bachelor, Mr. Lazelle, and you can't understand a mother's anxiety."

"Indeed I can," he said earnestly. "Only 'the life is more than meat, and the body than raiment.'"

Grandma was puzzled and annoyed.

"Dear me, I don't know why you are quoting Scripture in such a mysterious way," she remarked. "What does it mean?"

"It means just this." The rector spoke with a quiet air of authority which he could assume sometimes. "Tracy has a great deal of that mysterious thing that we call soul. There are some who are born to make the world all the better for their presence in it, and she is one of those beings. From her earliest girlhood I have seen her feeling her way toward the light that shall help her to accomplish her work. You may feed her daintily, clothe her richly, and give her the highest place that society can offer; but if you fetter her soul, you destroy the purpose of her life."

"But who wants to fetter her soul?" demanded Mrs. Taunton irritably. "Can this vague work you mention be accomplished only by a spinster?"

Mr. Lazelle smiled. "Have I ever been the fierce advocate of single-blessedness?" he asked. "No; but I hold that women like Tracy should not enter into a mere bodily union. A soul like hers should have its rightful mate for time and for eternity."

"And you mean to say that Sir Alfred is not the true soul-mate?" grandma cried in exasperation. "How can you talk such rubbish? And how is she to know the right one if she gives up this one? You unmarried men are all alike; every one of you has a screw loose in his brain."

The rector laughed outright. But he dropped the subject.

CHAPTER VI

HOPES AND DREAMS.

“All yesterday I was spinning,
Sitting alone in the sun;
And the dream that I spun was so lengthy,
It lasted till day was done.”

—A. PROCTER.

“NOTHING,” said grandma, speaking to herself in a determined voice, “nothing shall ever persuade me that they are not meant for each other.”

She was sitting at her open window on one of those golden afternoons which made one forget that there had ever been winter and rough weather. A black-bird was piping his old tune in the garden; sometimes a soft puff of wind scattered a few rose-petals at her feet; a great humble-bee droned sleepily about the room. Never had life seemed so tranquil to Mrs. Taunton; never had the future promised such delightful things. All her own girlish dreams of ambition were about to be fulfilled in the destiny of her grand-daughter.

She remembered, as if it were an event of yesterday, the attention that a certain young lord had once paid her at a county ball. She had been a pretty girl then, wearing her golden-brown hair in wonderful loops and braids and curls; and her white dress and blue sash had set off her pink-and-white beauty to the best advantage. All her friends said that she had made a conquest; and Mr. Taunton, a shy young fellow in those days, had stood afar off, and cursed the viscount in the depths of his jealous

heart. But the dream faded, as such dreams are apt to do; the lord went his way, married into his own set, and became a gouty earl with a heavily encumbered estate; and grandma wedded grandpa (not without a secret conviction that she might have done better), and spent many a peaceful year of matrimony with him. Still, although she had been a good wife and an admirable mother, Mrs. Taunton always felt that she would have shone as a countess; her natural dignity had fitted her for a position which she had never been permitted to fill.

She had ever been an ambitious woman; but her ambition was not of the highest kind. Such as it was, however, it had helped her to tread a good many of life's rugged ways with firm feet. She had held her head high because she was possessed with the notion that she had been created for higher things. If she had been tempted to give in, and to sit down to cry by the wayside, she had remembered that she had very nearly married a peer of the realm, and that it behooved her, therefore, to carry herself with the lofty air of one who had only just missed being a great person. Dear old lady, it was this thought that kept her upright and trim of figure when others of her age sat huddled up in their chairs. It was this thought that gave her the power of management, and made her house one of the best-ruled homes that could be found in the whole country.

She had gone through life, from its early days, with that

“Devotion to something afar,”

which lends wings to the tired feet, and strength to the weary frame. Her aspiration had never soared clear above the mists of earth; she had always felt that she could have been satisfied with the best things that the world had to give. Yet this feeling owed its origin to an imperfect knowledge of her own na-

ture; for grandma, as a countess, would never have been contented with her position. She would have desired to rise above it and, in the effort to rise, she would have discovered that there were heights of which she had never had a glimpse at all.

But as she sat dreaming in the afternoon sunshine she congratulated herself on Tracy's wonderful success. Many of the things that she had vainly longed for would be granted to her grandchild. Tracy would be the leading lady of the county; all Ferngate would be at her feet. As for the rector (here grandma's brow contracted for a moment), he would have to confess that old bachelors ought to preserve a discreet silence about love affairs. Mrs. Taunton was so vexed with him that she quite forgot how she had forced him into speech.

There was only one little cloud to cast its shadow over the brightness of her fair expectations; this was the dread of Lady Montjoy's arrival at Wood-court.

Grandma was shrewd enough to know that a mother's influence has often been powerful enough to spoil the "best-laid schemes." She had seen young men lured away from their lady-loves when all was going merrily as a marriage bell, and not a hint of impending change had ever reached the mind of the luckless fair one. At the thought of Lady Montjoy, cool, proud, and civil, this happy old dreamer dropped her knitting-pins and gazed absently at her geraniums and calceolarias with fear in her heart.

The best way to guard against failure was to settle everything before her ladyship appeared. And that could be accomplished easily enough if Tracy would consent to hurry matters on a little; but alas! no one knew Tracy's waywardness better than her grandmother. Years ago Mrs. Taunton had complained that the girl was always saying and doing unexpected things.

"You are constantly surprising me," grandma sometimes said. "I never know what is coming where you are concerned."

"How should you?" Tracy had asked. "I don't know what is coming myself. My inner life is perpetually changing; if I look for the set of feelings which dominated me last week, I can't find them. If I search for the particular fancy which fascinated me last month, I discover that it is utterly vanished. Something quite new has come in its place. You are a charming granny, but what exasperates me is your unreasonable expectations. You refuse to accommodate yourself to the fleeting lights and shades of my adorable character."

It was true that Tracy seemed to her grandmother to be a creature made up, as she had said, of fleeting lights and shades. If one could only fix a favorable light, and make it permanent! Grandma resolved to go to work in a cautious manner, and try to bring the girl into a quiet and reasonable frame of mind. Moreover, she hardly thought that her task would be as difficult as usual; Tracy seemed really to enjoy Sir Alfred's devotion; already they appeared to have established an excellent understanding between them. When the young fellow related any of his experiences, she gave him an undivided attention, which expressed her belief that he was worth listening to. And grandma only wanted her to go just one little step farther than she had gone already. She wanted her to let Sir Alfred see (in a perfectly modest and maidenly fashion), that she was willing to be, not only the companion of his summer days, but the faithful partner who would share the winter of his life.

The door opened, and Tracy herself, wearing a hat and gloves, and carrying her sunshade, came into the room.

"You don't mean to say that you are going out for a walk!" exclaimed the old lady in dismay.

"Yes," Tracy answered gravely. "Little Ben wants to see me very much. I am afraid that child is going to die."

"Now, Tracy, you are distressing yourself about nothing." Mrs. Taunton put down her knitting and spoke impressively. "Children don't die of every slight ailment that may happen to attack them; and little Ben is as strong as a cart-horse."

"He is not as strong as you think, grandma." The girl's eyes were dim with tears. "And he is very fond of me; Jane says he asks for me every minute."

"Jane is a crafty woman. She knows that you have taken a liking to her boy, and she trades upon your feelings. It is too hot for you to go to that stuffy little cottage to-day. Besides, you may catch something."

"His illness is not infectious. You are wrong about Jane, grandma. When she lived here she was the most faithful of servants, and she is thinking only of her child when she writes. You don't love children as I do, and you can't realize how much I want to go to Ben."

"O Tracy, how difficult it is to manage you!" Mrs. Taunton leaned back in her easy-chair with an expression of deep vexation stamped upon her face. "You are thinking of little Ben when you ought to be occupied with matters of much greater importance—matters which concern yourself and your deepest interests."

"I think far too much about myself," said Tracy honestly. "I am happiest when I lose sight of self altogether. Good-by, grandma; I'm going to Ben."

"This is sheer self-will," exclaimed grandma, in a temper. "Sir Alfred is sure to be here in a few minutes, and then—"

"Why, then he will find me gone." Tracy spoke in an airy manner, adjusting a cluster of geraniums in her bodice. "No one knows how to entertain a young man better than my charming grandmother.

Go back a few years, and believe that Sir Alfred is your old flame, Lord Burrowfield. Perhaps our friend is his lord re-incarnated."

With these words she vanished, leaving Mrs. Taunton in a state of intense irritation.

It was as if Tracy had penetrated into the depths of her mind, seen her little plans, and instantly set herself to thwart them. The girl was so terribly quicksighted that sometimes the old lady was afraid even to *think* in her presence. And now, just when it was most important for Tracy to let Sir Alfred see that his presence was desired, she had started off on an absurd errand, exactly as if she wanted to avoid him. What was the construction which he would of course put upon her absence? His self-love would be wounded, he would take offence and stay away from the house, and then Lady Montjoy would come, and gain an easy victory. It would not be difficult to persuade him to forget a girl who had shown him that she could exist without him.

She resumed her knitting with a gloomy brow, and had finished her fifth row when a peal from the hall bell resounded through the house. He had come, then? Yes, here he was, looking very handsome in his suit of gray, and directing a furtive glance through the window into the garden.

"Another glorious day, Mrs. Taunton," he said. "I'm going to think that our climate has turned over a new leaf. My mother will hardly believe that she has come to England."

"Do you expect her very soon?" asked grandma with a sinking heart.

"Not till the end of next week. That will give me time to complete one or two improvements. By the way, I want you to see what I've done on the island in the middle of the lake. You remember the island, don't you?"

"Not very distinctly," grandma confessed. "I have not seen Woodcourt for many years, you know."

"Of course not. I'm always forgetting that the place has been going to ruin for ages. And things considered, I wonder that it isn't in a worse state. But I've taken rather a fancy to that island, and I set to work upon it at once, letting other matters go. I should like to show it to you and Miss Taunton."

"Improvements are always interesting," said grandma smoothly. "And we are so proud of Woodcourt; it is the only great house near Ferngate, you see. So we have made much of it."

"Will you come to luncheon on Wednesday?" asked the young man eagerly. "Lazelle has promised to come, and I'll send a carriage for you and Miss Taunton at one. Will that be too early?"

"Thank you. I will ask Tracy if she has made any other engagement, but I don't think she has. One o'clock will suit us very well."

He rose, and made a step toward the open French window.

"Shall I find her out there?" he said. "We may as well settle it at once."

Grandma cleared her throat uneasily.

"She is not in the garden, Sir Alfred. The fact is, Tracy has vexed me a little by starting off to see a sick child. The dear girl is so anxious to do a kindness that she forgets to study herself. In this hot weather it is not good for her to go into stuffy cottages where there is illness."

"Certainly not." An expression of unmistakable alarm appeared on the baronet's handsome young face. "What is the illness? Not small-pox?"

"Oh, no, no! My dear Sir Alfred, there has not been an outbreak of small-pox in the town for fifty years. Ferngate is one of the healthiest places in creation. This child is a pet of Tracy's, and she always worries herself about his little ailments. It is very silly of her."

"I see." He looked relieved. "He has taken the

place of a lapdog. Where does the child live? Not a very long way off, I hope."

"About a mile away, at a place called Long Gardens. It is not an attractive spot, by any means; and the cottages are shamefully out of repair. I have my doubts about the drainage."

A smile flickered round Sir Alfred's well-cut mouth.

"I dare say the drainage is bad," he said indifferently. "The property called Long Gardens belongs to me. But they'll have to wait a long while before anything is done."

Grandma began to feel that the fates were against her that day. What evil impulse had prompted her to talk about drainage? She hastened to atone for her blunder.

"I don't think anything is seriously wrong: people who live in cottages are always grumbling," she said quickly. "I wish Tracy was not so ready to listen to their grievances."

"I will give her a lecture—shall I?" There was a bright boyish look in the young fellow's brown eyes. No real sorrow had ever left a trace on his smooth forehead, and for a moment his usual expression of haughty melancholy had vanished. Grandma was so fascinated that she could then and there have given him leave to do anything.

"Indeed you shall," she answered. "I am sure you will do her good. I am a prosy old woman, and I dare say she is tired of listening to me."

"Very well," he said. "I'll follow her at once, and bring her back to you in a repentant frame of mind."

The old lady looked after him with an expression of deep satisfaction; and when the door closed she sank back in her chair with a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER VII.

LONG GARDENS.

“But *he*—to *him* the least thing given
Means great things at a distance;
He wants my world, my sun, my heaven,
Soul, body, whole existence.”

—MRS. BROWNING.

WHAT a splendid day it was! Even in a piece of waste ground, where fragments of broken crockery were strewn about, there were weed flowers in bloom. This bit of land lay outside the town of Ferngate, and it was confidently believed that it would be covered with houses at no very distant date. But Ferngate was a slow-moving place; the people who lived over their shops in the High Street were contented with the old roofs which had sheltered their fathers and grandfathers, and were not to be tempted into hastily built villas and terraces. So the waste ground was left to grow thistles and wild camomile, and everything that had the power of scampering and jumping was at liberty to use it as a playground. Children made the most of this favorite spot, and red kerchiefs and white pinafores were fluttering in a soft west wind as Tracy walked that way.

She was glad to get out of the house and away from grandma this afternoon. She could always understand the old lady's hidden meanings without the aid of words. And she was beginning, half unconsciously, to resent Mrs. Taunton's increasing satisfaction in Sir Alfred's frequent visits. What

right had grandma to smile at the sound of the door-bell, and fix her beaming eyes upon her grandchild with an expression of unspeakable delight? Tracy was by no means sure that there was any legitimate cause for rejoicing; even if Sir Alfred had fallen in love with her, really and truly, what then?

What then, indeed? Was it such a wonderful thing for a young man to fall in love with a young woman? Tracy felt that love-making would be much nicer if other people did not exchange meaning glances and notice everything that went on. But nothing was so uncomfortable as the consciousness that you were not sure of your own feelings at all!

The children played on, tumbling and screaming over the grass; and one rosy boy of eight stopped in the middle of leap-frog to nod to the young lady.

"I'm on my way to see Ben," she called out; "shall I find him better?"

"A little better, miss, and frettin' dreadful after you," said the boy, going over a "back" before he had finished his sentence.

Long Gardens was the name given to four small houses which stood just on the borders of the waste land, and were very much out of repair. The Long Gardens had lost their boundaries, and had become one piece of ground, common to all the tenants alike. There was no fence at all; the pottery fragments which abounded in this place were to be found among the ragged shrubs and uncultivated flowers belonging to the cottages. Even the roses and lilies had an air of slovenliness, growing as they did out of such untidy soil. No palings divided the back doors, and as it was the custom in Long Gardens for the tenants to live chiefly in their back rooms, they were intimately acquainted with each other's domestic affairs.

Tracy did not stand upon ceremony where little Ben was concerned; moreover, Jane Shaw, always

clean among the uncleanly, was seldom taken at a disadvantage. So the visitor stepped lightly across the irregularities of the ground; picked her way through straggling tufts of mignonette, avoided treading on any of the marigolds whose bold amber faces were thrust forward everywhere, and looked in on Jane, bending over a saucepan, stirring some arrowroot for her sick child.

"Ah!" said Jane, speaking in a quiet voice and lifting a faded face that was comely still, "I thought you'd come, Miss Tracy."

"Where is he?" Tracy asked softly. "Oh, I see. You have made him up a little bed in the corner, and he can lie there and look at the marigolds. Dear Ben, how nice this is!"

A pretty little lad of five, whose blue eyes were languid with sickness, greeted Tracy with a faint smile.

She took him into her lap, holding his body in an easy position with the kind of skill which comes by nature to some women.

"So Ben is not so very ill after all," she said in a tender voice. "Will he be able to eat the nice stuff that mother makes? I think he will if I tell him a story."

The child gave a low murmur of assent, leaning his head on her breast as if it were a well-known resting-place. She went on talking to him in soft, cooing tones, while Jane moved quietly to and fro. When the arrowroot was ready Ben's appetite and spirits seemed to be slowly coming back. He could sit up and eat, supported by Tracy's arm.

"What made him ill?" Tracy asked. "Has there been any kind of sickness going about among the children here?"

"There's always sickness among them, miss," Jane replied. "The smells from those little puddles in the gardens are bad for us all. My husband complains and complains; but what's the good?"

Long Gardens never was a healthy spot, they say. I wish we'd known that before we settled here."

"Why don't you remove?" said Tracy, softly stroking Ben's curls. "It will not do to bring these little ones up in unwholesome air. Something must be done."

"It wouldn't be easy to move, miss; Shaw was ill himself, off and on, all through the winter. We're a little behind with our rent, that's the truth."

"Is it very much?" asked Tracy, giving Ben a gentle little hug.

"No, miss." There was a misty look about Jane's eyes as they rested on the girl. "It is not much, and Shaw hopes to set the matter right soon. He's working overtime, and we shall get on again, please God. But when the hot weather came in the puddles took to smelling, and somehow all the strength went clean out of my back and legs. And then Ben fell sick."

"You don't look over-bright, Jane," Tracy remarked sadly. "Why can't the owner of the property be written to? Whoever he is, he ought not to neglect his houses in this way."

"Long Gardens belong to the Montjoy estate, Miss Tracy," said Jane hopelessly, "and they may as well belong to the queen. Them Montjoys don't take a bit more notice of us than royalty would—not a bit. Shaw says that if the Almighty allows a man to have a good big piece of this earth, he means it to be well looked after. In the beginning, as Shaw says, the Lord gave Eden to Adam, and told him that he had got to attend to it. I wish the Montjoys would take the trouble to look after *their* garden."

Jane had ended her sentence with a little clattering among the cups and plates on the dresser. Her back was turned toward the open door, and she did not see that some one was standing there, looking into the kitchen. Nor did Tracy see, for her head was

bent over the child; but in another moment the darkening of the light made her look up.

"Sir Alfred!" she said, holding Ben a little closer and drawing a quick breath. "What brings you here?"

"You have brought me," he answered gayly. "When I called at the Laurels I found Mrs. Taunton in a most uncomfortable state of mind. She had taken it into her head that you were running into danger."

"Grandma's nerves are out of order." Tracy said calmly. "There is no danger here."

She smiled at Jane as she spoke; and then suddenly remembering the subject of their conversation, she added:

"If there is a danger it is in your power to remove it, so I am glad that you have come."

His face clouded over.

"Do you want some one to go for a doctor?" he asked, with a doubtful glance at the child in her arms.

"No," she answered, "the doctor has done all that he can. It is for you to do the rest; and if you will do it we shall not want the doctor again."

There was a sweet ring of appeal in her voice, and he knew at once what it was that she required of him; but he would not appear to know. Jane looked at him furtively, and then gave all her attention to her boy.

"Do let me take him now, miss," she entreated; "he is heavy, and you'll be tired."

She did not seem to see the look which Sir Alfred cast on little Ben. Yet she did see it, and it haunted her memory for many a day afterward. It was a look of dislike and resentment. It seemed to say plainly that the little fellow had actually dared to be a nuisance. But Tracy, pressing her lips to Ben's forehead, saw nothing.

"I shall stay longer when I come again," she said, parting with her burden reluctantly. "It is too bad

that I should be hurried, but grandma is unusually fidgety to-day."

"You are not to linger. I have had my orders," Sir Alfred remarked from the door. He had not crossed the threshold, and Jane felt instinctively that he did not mean to enter.

"I am coming," Tracy said. She parted with Jane with a whispered word and a warm hand-clasp, and then the two went away together.

Jane Shaw was a rustic by birth and her education had been of the simplest kind; but she was not a commonplace woman. She had often, and against her will, that curious insight into other people's inner selves which is the gift of a very few. When those two went away from her door together, she looked after them with a startled expression in her eyes; and then she shivered, although her little kitchen was warm with the summer sunshine.

Was there any peril hovering over Miss Tracy? Surely it was a foolish thing to feel afraid of that handsome young gentleman; but it was something very near akin to fear which crept over her when she saw them side by side. She did not like this stranger—not because he would not cross her threshold—but because she had looked just for an instant into the inmost man, and had seen, as in a flash, a depth of fierce passion and selfishness. When they had gone away, she stood for a moment as if she had been rooted to the floor, and then she suddenly crossed the door-step, and watched the two figures moving over the waste ground. The shouts of the children at play came ringing through the air; a warm light spread over the flowery waste and transformed it into a bit of fairy-land; but Jane felt just then a strange sinking of the heart.

"So you have had a call from Miss Tracy," said a voice behind her, "and she has gone off with Sir Alfred Montjoy? I wish she could persuade him to improve Long Gardens."

Jane turned quickly, with a sense of comfort. The rector was not a brilliant man; he had never made a great noise in a world where there is always too much din, but he had the art of diffusing peace. Jane Shaw felt soothed when she saw his portly figure and benign face, and drew a deep breath of satisfaction.

"O sir, I'm glad to see you!" she said. "We want to move away from Long Gardens. I'd rather not live on Sir Alfred Montjoy's land, sir, if you please. Shaw was ill last winter, as you know, sir; and we owe seven pounds for rent, not a sixpence more or less. It shall be paid, somehow; my husband shall borrow it from somewhere, and we'll go before worse things happen to us."

It was clear that Jane was unusually agitated; she stood twisting a corner of her apron, and her thin face wore an unwonted flush. Mr. Lazelle regarded her with quiet interest.

"This place is certainly unwholesome," he said after a pause. "But perhaps Sir Alfred may be moved to do something. You have a good bit of garden here, you see."

"We'll put up with a smaller garden, sir, elsewhere. Only let us get away; I'll begin at Shaw as soon as ever he comes in to his tea. He's got a good master who knows that he's a man to be trusted, and I think he'd help my husband at a pinch. Dear Miss Tracy! my heart's disquieted about her, sir."

"Why is your heart disquieted about her?" the rector asked. "Did she not seem well?"

"Yes, sir; quite as well as usual, although, to my thinking, Miss Tracy is never as strong as most of us. It's not her health, though, that troubles me."

"Then what is it, Mrs. Shaw?" he persisted gently. "You are strongly attached to her, I know, and love has keen sight. Do you see a shadow hovering near her?"

"I do, sir. You've put my feelings into plain words for me," said Jane, with a frank look into his face. "It made me shiver to see *him* by her side."

"Do you fear that some evil will come to her through him?" the rector went on, "you need not be afraid to speak."

Jane twisted her apron harder than ever, and the light of excitement shone in her eyes. It was not often that this quiet woman was so moved; Mr. Lazelle had seen her patiently living the life of a workman's wife, and he knew that she had always lived it well. He could rely on Jane's common sense in everyday matters, and this reliance made her words seem weighty. She was not hysterical; her sorrows, as well as her joys, had always been accepted with that quietness which inspires respect and trust.

"If it were to any one but you, sir," she said, "I should be afraid to speak. But, sir, I do want to tell you that I've had a warning."

She paused, and went back suddenly into the kitchen to satisfy herself that little Ben was perfectly safe. The child, lying quietly on his bed in the corner, was amusing himself in a feeble fashion with a wooden horse, minus its head. The mother saw that this was a hopeful sign, and returned to the spot where the rector waited beside the tall lilies.

"Miss Tracy was sitting with Ben in her lap," she went on, "and I had just been saying that there was no good in asking the Montjoys' to improve Long Gardens, when I was seized, all of a sudden, with a fit of shivers. As I had got the cups and saucers in my hands, ready too set them out for tea, I made a sort of clattering, sir, as you may fancy. Then Miss Tracy looked up suddenly at the door, and gave a quick little start. 'Sir Alfred!' she said. And I turned round sharp, and saw him standing on the threshold."

"Well?" said the rector gently. He did not betray any surprise; he was simply listening gravely.

"Well, sir, the sight of such a handsome young gentleman made me ashamed of my shivers; and yet, what did I do but shiver again in the queerest way? But when I went too take the child from Miss Tracy's arms, I saw him cast such an evil look at my poor little boy that I knew why I'd shivered. And I made up my mind, then and there, that even if Sir Alfred Montjoy were to build us a new cottage with golden walls, I'd never stay on his land."

Mr. Lazelle was silent, but his eyes seemed to encourage Jane to go on.

"He said that Mrs. Taunton had felt anxious about Miss Tracy," she continued; "and my dear miss squeezed my hand and said good-by. I watched them going off together side by side; she a perfect lady inside and out; he a perfect gentleman on the outside; but maybe my eyes were dim. For though the light was shining everywhere, she seemed to be walking in a shadow, and the shadow came from him. They moved on and on, and the shadow went with them. And then you spoke behind me, sir, and I was right glad to hear your voice."

The rector smiled upon her kindly.

"Perhaps your eyes were dim," he said. "If so, one can hardly wonder, for you are not feeling strong, and you are anxious about your little one. Still, Mrs. Shaw, I will not persuade you to remain here if you feel drawn in another direction. And about the seven pounds—I dare say Mr. Steere will advance the money, but if not——"

"O sir, you're the best of men!" Jane's cheeks were flushing again. "But you can't be always lending and helping, and they are mean who will let you do it. Mr. Steere will come forward, sir, never fear."

"I'll go in and look at Ben," said Mr. Lazelle, turning toward the kitchen. "And don't be afraid that any one has cast an evil spell on your boy. I own I think all the better of a young man if he likes children; but it is a liking which some men do

not develop till they are middle-aged. I ought to be a very happy fellow, for I have always loved the little ones and they have always loved me."

Little Ben testified to the truth of these words by dropping his horse and welcoming the rector with outstretched arms. The child was really better, Jane said with reviving cheerfulness.

Mr. Lazelle went his way with his mind running on Mrs. Shaw's words. He did not think that even Tracy's persuasions would move Sir Alfred to improve Long Gardens; but he knew that the girl would plead for the poor tenants with all her might. Did he put any faith in that "warning" of which Jane had spoken so earnestly? It would, perhaps, be saying too much to assert that he did; but it is certain that he put faith in another warning which came from his inner self; and yet he could not tell how to avert the danger.

CHAPTER VIII.

DECIDING.

“Would’st thou cling to me still,
As down life’s sloping hill
We *came* at last through the unresting years?
Art thou prepared for tears,
For time’s sure-coming losses,
For life’s despites and crosses,
My love, my love?”

—L. MORRIS.

WHEN Tracy walked away from Long Gardens she had no suspicion of Jane’s forebodings. In fact, she was feeling very happy. As she tripped lightly over the uneven ground a half-smile of innocent triumph played about her mouth. She was exulting beforehand in the anticipated success of her powers of persuasion. Sir Alfred could not refuse her anything, she thought with a little thrill of girlish pride. She was fully aware of her strong influence over him, and quite resolved that it should be a good influence. Somehow—she knew not why—her mind was less unsettled than it had been earlier in the day. Perhaps this was because she had escaped from grandma and her schemes; and there would be a pleasure in convincing the old lady that Sir Alfred would follow without being beckoned.

On the whole, she was sure that she had never liked him as well as she did now.

For a little while they walked in silence, and then she stumbled slightly over a stone, and he held out his hand to help her. She looked up at him with a deepening of the smile that was already on her face,

unconscious that she was, at that moment, fresher and brighter than he had ever seen her before.

"You *will* do something to improve your cottages?" she said in a half-playful tone of entreaty. "I know you will."

His handsome face softened, and the brown eyes that looked into hers were full of promises.

"You do know," he answered. "It is easy to see that I am ready to do a great deal—when you bid me."

"But I do not ask for a great deal." Her voice was very sweet in its pleading.

"It is the bad drainage that has made poor little Ben so ill, and you can soon have the drains set right."

She held her face beseechingly up to his, and his reply came at once, readily, cheerfully, although he scarcely thought about the words he was saying.

"Yes, Long Gardens shall be set right."

"Now you are very good," she said softly; and again a silence fell upon them both. Even the dullest men have certain instincts, and Sir Alfred (who was not dull by any means) was realizing that Tracy's heart was stirred with a strong pulsation. He cared for this girl passionately; he wanted to be the master and possessor of that delicate face and of those deep eyes that shone at him through their black lashes. She was fresh, she was thoroughly unhackneyed, she had the nameless charm without which the most perfect beauty cannot long enthrall. His temperament always made him demand amusement, and no one had ever amused him as Tracy had done. This was the first time that she had ever asked anything of him, and if the request were a nuisance, what then? He felt he could not but concede to her what she wished, and then came a quick after-thought:

"There will be no need to do it, after all."

Alferd Montjoy had the strong, selfish nature which walks straight to the gratification of its desire,

and does not pause for any trifling consideration. He was bent upon making Tracy his own; he meant to marry her, and he was ready to promise anything to gain his end. Very quickly he had discovered that she would not be easily won. Mrs. Taunton might smile and be gracious and compliant, but her granddaughter would keep him off with her delicate little mockeries and hold him, as it were, far away from her. All the women he had known had bored him after a time; he had seen through their pretences and affectations, and was well acquainted with all those feminine devices which are as old as the hills. But here was a girl in whom he could thoroughly believe, a girl who would be worth the trouble of fighting for and winning. No matter what it cost him, he *would* gain her; on that point he was quite resolved, and nothing should turn him from his purpose.

He could believe in her, and he wanted her to believe in him; but he did not care to make himself worthy of her trust. She would not marry him if she did not believe in him; it was necessary, therefore, that he should seem to be all that she wished him to be. If she were undeceived later on, there would only be the inevitable enlightenment which had come to millions of other women after marriage. She would open her eyes to the fact that he meant to please himself and no one else, and then she would settle down quite calmly and amiably into her position.

And then, too, what a good position he had to give! All that she did not fully realize for herself grandma was realizing for her; and it was well that she had the old lady's worldly wisdom to fall back upon. Tracy was peculiar; she had exalted notions about life, and if it had not been for Mrs. Taunton she would have dreamed all her best years away. Montjoy had a friendly liking for grandma, who was nearer his own level than Tracy was, and he did not despise her assistance. At any cost he must

win the girl whom he loved in his own passionate fashion, and he honestly believed that it would be "I a good thing for her if she became his wife.

That Tracy would be happier if she lived alone and poor, than she would be if she were bound to him, was too absurd an idea to be entertained.

And really, on a day like this, when nature was in her sweetest mood, it seemed impossible that a young man and a young woman should not live happily together, even if there was merely a bodily union. The body was all that Sir Alfred thought of or cared about. People discoursed glibly of souls and spirits; and if you had questioned him closely he would probably have said that he supposed that an immortal part of you would live on after the mortal part had decayed. This was a venerable and respectable belief; and he meant to stick to it. Meanwhile, he did not concern himself about that immortal part or its future destiny in the least.

This, then, was the man for whom Tracy Taunton's heart was beginning to beat faster than it had ever beat before. This was the companion by whose side she was to walk all the days of her pilgrimage; and her grandmother, who loved her well, was wearying Heaven with her prayers to bring the union to pass. Truly, when we look back on our lives, and remember the things that we have prayed for, we have good reason to blush for ourselves. What miseries have we not striven to win for those we have loved best! What thorns we should have planted in their path if our petitions had been heard! It is well for affectionate parents and guardians that most of them go out of this world without realizing the mischief that they have wrought in the lives that were under their control; and better still for them that there was a limit to that control.

Wilful and wayward as Tracy had always seemed, the desire to satisfy her grandmother was deeply rooted in her inmost self. She loved the old woman

dearly, and had made hundreds of little unknown sacrifices for her sake—sacrifices of time and inclination which no one had ever suspected. And although she had set out on her walk to Long Gardens with some irritation against grandma, the mood had passed away. Sir Alfred had followed her. He was tender, gentle, complying, all that a lover in earnest ought to be; and she was beginning to think that grandma's judgment was right after all.

Mrs. Taunton looked anxiously at the pair when they re-entered the room together, but Tracy's smile reassured her at once.

"It is delightful out of doors, grandma," she said, "and Sir Alfred has been wonderfully good. He has promised to improve Long Gardens."

Later on, when the old woman and the young girl were alone together, the former could not resist the impulse to speak out plainly. She put out her hand and stroked Tracy's smooth cheek with a caressing touch.

"My dear," she said, "you must see that things can't go on in this way. Sir Alfred will soon ask you an important question. Have you thought about your answer?"

The girl sat down upon a hassock at Mrs. Taunton's feet, and sighed heavily.

"I have thought and thought and thought," she murmured with her head on grandma's shoulder. "Oh! it's a dreadful thing to get married, isn't it?"

"I did not find it so," replied the old lady.

"But you are not *me*, grandma. You never had any difficulty in making up your mind."

"I cultivated a habit of decision. You ought to make up your mind, Tracy."

"But supposing I don't like it after I have made it up?"

"I fear, my dear, that you have encouraged indecision of character; in fact, you have made a kind of boast of it. You think it would be too monotonous to continue long in one shape."

"There's something in that," admitted Tracy.

The shoulder on which she was leaning trembled a little, the hand that stroked her hair was unsteady, and grandma's voice quivered when she spoke again.

"O Tracy, I want to see you settled before I die! To go out of the world and leave you alone would be more than I could bear. Laura is too stupid to take care of you, although she means well. And you are delicate, my child; you cannot rough it as some do; you want comforts and luxuries."

"I think I could do without them," said Tracy meditatively. "I'm almost sure that I could."

"And I am sure that you could not. Tracy, what would you have—what are you waiting for? Sir Alfred is as handsome as anybody in a novel; and indeed it seems to me as if one of your dream heroes had come into your everyday life. Think of all the good that you may do if you marry him. You are fond of helping people, and when you are Lady Mont-joy your power of helpfulness will be very great. And then there is his life to be considered as well as your own. It often goes ill with a man when he fails to win the woman of his choice. Men don't take a disappointment as meekly as we do; they resent it, and it is like a bitter drop that poisons all the sweetness that is poured into the cup. A great love—such a love as he feels for you—is strong enough to raise him to heights he has never thought of yet."

"Yes it may raise him." She looked up suddenly into Mrs. Taunton's face. "But will he sink again? As months and years go on, and other interests and pleasures crowd into his life, shall I not lose my power to lift? The lifting power ought not to be all on my side, grandma. It would be terrible to feel that I was losing my hold, would it not?"

"You have a faint heart, Tracy," said Mrs. Taunton, in a voice that was neither clear nor firm. "If every girl were as full of doubts as you are, there would be

no more marriages. I am sorry for Sir Alfred, and sorry for you. I thought you cared for him a little."

The color rushed suddenly into her cheeks.

"I believe I do care for him, grandma," she cried. "And if he asks me I will say yes. Don't fret any more only tell me that I have made you happy."

"Very happy, my darling." And the old lady folded the girl lovingly in her arms, shedding tears of gratitude and joy.

CHAPTER IX.

BY THE LAKE.

“We two stood there with never a third,
But each by each, as each knew well;
The sights we saw, and the sounds we heard,
The lights and the shades made up a spell
Till the trouble grew and stirred.”

—BROWNING.

THE little island in the middle of the lake at Wood-court was no longer a neglected spot given over to water-rats and reeds. The dilapidated old hut had entirely disappeared, and in its stead there was a picturesque thatched cottage, large enough to contain a keeper and his wife. It was a charming little dwelling with a rustic porch and diamond-paned casements under the overhanging eaves; and although it was brand new it seemed to harmonize perfectly with its surroundings. The landing-stage, too, was new; and there was a beautiful new boat, in which Tracy seated herself in dreamy content, and was rowed across the lake by Sir Alfred.

There was no one yet established in the cottage; and, when they had landed, she was conducted to a garden-seat, placed on the slope in front of the little house. All the weeds had been rooted up; careful hands had pruned the over-luxuriance of the boughs, opening out a full view of the lake, now shining in the golden mist of a September afternoon. As yet there were few tokens of the wane of that long summer; here and there a touch of soft crimson or dull amber gave a hint of the slow approach of autumn;

but there were no gaps in the rich fulness of the foliage, no chill breaths in the warm air. Tracy took off her hat, and sat bareheaded under the shade of the trees; and Alfred Montjoy watched her steadfastly, with the growing consciousness that she touched his fancy more than ever to-day. Fresh and delicate the girl looked, her dark-gray eyes gleaming under their heavy black fringes, and the white teeth showing between the soft red lips. She was not pensive now; a moment ago her laugh had rung out merrily, and there was a look of mirth still lingering about her face—a look which made it easier for the man by her side to speak out the desire of his heart. In the graver moods that visited her sometimes, Tracy always seemed to be miles away in spirit from her lover; it was when they were as boy and girl together, rejoicing in their youth, that they drew nearest to each other.

“I like this place,” she said, suddenly breaking a brief silence, “and I am glad that you have still left it with something of the aspect of a wilderness. If it were not for that glimpse of the stately old house there, one might believe that one was a settler in some wild wooded country far away. But the Court reminds you that you are within the bounds of civilization, and close to all the proprieties.”

“Don’t you like the old Court?” he asked wistfully. “Doesn’t it seem like a home?”

“Yes, it does. It gives one a welcome sense of protection, and a selfish kind of peace.”

As she spoke she leaned back in the corner of the bench, half closing her eyes, and enjoying the honeyed feeling of content that was stealing over her in these warm shades. She was fond of listening to the leaf-murmurs here, fond of watching the moor-hen that grew bold in their silent presence, and the quick, silvery flashes that the fish made, now and then, above the water. It was the very spot for world-forgetfulness and lazy day-dreams.

"Tracy," said Alfred Montjoy in a low voice, "I want you always at Woodcourt. I cannot endure the place without you now. It was your influence over me which made me begin to take an interest in it. I've had an unsettled life, dear; but if you will make a home with me, I shall never be a rover any more. All was nothing till you came, Tracy; it's wonderful what a change one little woman can make in a man's existence, isn't it? Won't you look at me, and tell me that you love me?"

She did look—just for one second—at the handsome, passion-wrought face with the leaf shadows quivering over it, and her heart throbbed fast.

"Speak," he said again; and this time his voice had died into a whisper, and there was a look of hungry pain in his eyes.

Doubts, fears, self-distrust—all these were forgotten, purposely banished, maybe, by Tracy, when she felt the strong appeal of her lover's suffering. Grandma's words seemed to be ringing in her ears. "It often goes ill with a man when he fails to win the woman of his choice." How could she deny herself to one whose life would be a waste without her presence? And she did love him; surely at that moment she really loved him.

Did she give the answer he prayed for? She hardly knew; but he looked at her with a murmur of delight, and took her into his arms. There was a silence in which Tracy became aware that the leaves were whispering a lullaby, hushing her into a dream of security and rest. She allowed herself to be folded closely in Sir Alfred's strong embrace, and thought, in a vague way, that all the worrying was over, and everybody would be satisfied at last.

"I am so happy, darling," he said, still holding her fast. "Tracy, you are such a haughty little thing that I was half afraid you would give me some trouble. In getting you I have got everything that I wanted. You belong entirely to me now; your

thoughts are mine. I will not let you shut yourself up and dream."

She tried to protest against this restriction, but he closed her lips with a kiss.

"No more dreaming," he reiterated. "I mean to absorb your very mind into mine. Do you know, I could not bring myself to speak out sooner? You seemed determined to keep me off, and I got savage and miserable. Only yesterday I felt furious because of your coldness. But you are worth it all, my own."

"Let us go back to the house now," she said, gently disengaging herself from his clasp. "We have been away from grandma too long."

"I shall always love this little island, Tracy." He rose reluctantly. "We must come here again very soon. I don't know why you are in such a hurry to go: girls are always restless, I suppose. Just wait one moment longer, dear, and tell me again that you love me."

It must have been a hard heart that could resist the half-boyish earnestness of his entreaty. For the first time in his life he was under the spell of a genuine passion; and as he stood looking at her, his face eager and radiant, she felt that it was a glorious thing to be so prized.

"I do love you," came from her lips softly and gratefully. "And I will always try to make you as happy as you are now."

Mrs. Taunton was sitting in the library at Wood-court, and trying to keep up a conversation with the rector, who was unusually fidgety that day. Instead of sitting peacefully in an armchair, and devoting himself to his old friend, he wandered about the room, pulling down books and putting them up again; then took to gazing absently at the portrait of a man in armor over the carved chimney-piece, and finally walked to one of the windows and became absorbed in a view of the grounds.

"Sweet, peaceful old place," said grandma with a

sigh of content. "Where are our young people, I wonder? It takes some time to get to the island, does it not? I hope there will be no more plunges into the lake. Tracy will not soon forget the day when she came in here drenched from head to foot."

"Neither shall I forget it," murmured the rector at the window.

"What a beginning to a love-affair!" remarked Mrs. Taunton, more to herself than to him. "How I lectured her afterward! But all's well that ends well, and you know I always felt sure that they were made for each other. He is a dear fellow."

Mr. Lazelle was still looking across the flower-beds to a long path that ran on and on between hedges of clipped yew, and widened out at length into a green glade and a dim vision of shining water. They would return to the house by this way, he thought. And there could be only one result of that *tête-à-tête* on the island; he had felt this when he had seen them go away together; yet he stood there at the window in silence, hoping against his conviction.

Many a year had gone by since he had stood at another window in another house, watching for a girlish figure on a certain sunshiny afternoon. Then he had looked out, not on flower-beds and yew hedges, but on gray stone flags and an old Gothic arch that opened into one of the by-ways of an ancient town. Some one within the room was saying that Nelly was later than usual, when suddenly the girl emerged from the deep shadows of the arch, a slim, graceful shape in a white gown, with some blue ribbons fluttering about her. But she was not alone; a young man, tall and straight and soldierly, was by Nelly's side, and something that he had said had called a rose-flush into her cheeks, and a new light into her gentle eyes.

That was the ending of Mr. Lazelle's first and last love dream. Nelly, uncertain of herself, had shyly

encouraged the quiet curate, and found a pleasure in his attentions till the soldier crossed her path. She came in radiant that day after listening to the declaration of her hero; but, to do her justice, she had never realized the strength of the curate's attachment; nor did she, to the last hour of her life, ever guess how sharply she had made him suffer.

There was still another picture which memory had to show the rector as he stood at the library window. It was a moonlight picture; in the background was the Gothic arch; and in front, her figure illumined by the silver light, stood Nelly with a child in her arms, hesitating before the door of her old home. It was her first lover who ran to open the door and let her in—the poor crushed victim of man's cruelty—it was his kind hand that led the deserted wife to her father's fireside again.

The rector passed his hand across his eyes as if to shut out any more of memory's visions. Some chance resemblance between Nelly's husband and young Montjoy had recalled these scenes of the past, and they had depressed and troubled him with vague foreshadowings of sorrow. Grandma, seated at her ease in the armchair, was not vexed with any disquieting thoughts; but the shades were deepening and lengthening in the old gardens, and the golden light lay like a dazzling mist over the flowers and grass.

“Are they never coming?” she asked, after a spell of silence.

Mr. Lazelle removed his hand from his eyes, and looked out again.

“They are coming now,” he answered.

In a few minutes more they entered the room, bringing in a waft of fragrance from the flowery walks through which they had passed. Tracy, in a soft gray gown, wore a cluster of scarlet geranium in her bodice; her cheeks had a tinge of rose; her black hair curled in little rings and tendrils under a

plumy dove-colored hat. With that shy, sweet look on her face she was almost like a child, and she crossed over to grandma's chair with a kind of gentle hesitation which was new in her.

"We have been out a long time," she began to say timidly.

"We have settled something, Mrs. Taunton," said Montjoy with a ring of exultation in his voice. "Don't scold me for not speaking to you first; I was desperately anxious to know my fate. I couldn't rest, you know, till Tracy had put me out of my misery. It's all right, and now I hope you'll receive me graciously as a future grandson."

CHAPTER X.

THE OLD HERO.

“Do you wonder that my picture
Has become so like a friend?
It has seen my life’s beginnings,
It shall stay and cheer the end.”

—A. PROCTER.

THE September sunshine had faded into a sad, gray evening, and even Mrs. Taunton felt the influence of the gloom which had settled over the landscape. She seemed instinctively to respect Tracy’s desire for silence. The girl had done all that she had wished her to do; suspense and doubt had come to an end; grandma could afford to rest and let Tracy meditate in peace.

Upstairs, in the room which Tracy called her studio, a lamp was burning dimly under a transparent green shade. She could see the figure of Douglas outlined faintly in the subdued light, and, yielding to one of her old impulses, she went straight to the picture. Then she raised the shade, turned up the wick, and illuminated the dying knight with a sudden radiance which seemed to impart a new beauty to his face.

As she stood and gazed at this hero of her girlhood, all her old dreams of what heroism really was came slowly back. There was no glory like this divine glory of self-sacrifice; but something whispered that she had given up her ideal hero, and had nothing more to do with him now. Yet she did not cease to revere him as the true knight, the brave soul that could renounce every earthly good for the sake of

the cause he counted noblest and best. She had never cared anything about the queen whom he had served and worshipped. Even as a child she had realized that, like Blondel,

“ ‘Twas the kingship that failed in himself he was seeking.”

And without that intense yearning to serve something higher and better than himself a man is but a poor creature, thought Tracy, with a half-suppressed sigh.

Why was this parting with a being created by her own imagination so painful? She had been in love with her knight so long that he had become one of the rulers of her life; and now she had broken the links that had bound her to him for years. As she stood there, alone in the lamplight, she was conscious of a strange feeling of unfaithfulness. It was as if she had severed the mysterious tie that existed between herself and a kindred spirit, unknown and yet well known. And somehow, the child who had once held communion here with her dream-friend was happier than the woman who had just won the heart of a titled lover.

But what if it were possible, after all, for the dream-friend to be the true love! It is a difficult thing, in this world of half-lights, to tell which is the phantom and which is the reality. Are not the things which we grasp and handle the very things which deceive us most?

Thoughts like these came stealing into Tracy's mind as she stood and gazed at the picture. By and by, when she was married, and went to live at Woodcourt, she must leave this old engraving behind; it was not valuable enough to find a place among the works of art which the Montjoys had accumulated there. But just for a little while it would be hers still. For a little longer she might shut herself into this familiar room, and talk to Douglas as she had talked to him in years gone by.

As the evening darkened, a deeper sigh from the wind swept through the open window; and there were weird rustlings and whisperings in the ivy which grew thickly over Mrs. Taunton's old house. The gloom grew heavier, and the trees looked inky-black against the solemn sky as they swung to and fro. Tracy felt as if all things shared in the depression which was fast creeping over her own heart.

Her thoughts went back again to the days when she had entertained invisible guests in this old spare chamber, and had prattled about fairies to the sunset. Then the creepers had nodded as if they listened, and the wind, in its own soft fashion, had told its stories too. Even when the breeze and the rain made a confusion of sighs and whispers, she had not felt afraid to stay up there alone and let the wet leaves touch her face. But now everything was changed, a new influence was upon her, curbing her fancies, checking the old, free delight, in the flights of the imagination.

No doubt, she thought, the first feeling after an engagement was the consciousness of a fetter; all girls, she supposed, felt this; but of course the sense of peace and content would come later on. Meanwhile her mind was in a half-timid state, clinging to the past and fearing these new ties which bound her to an untried future. It comforted her, however, to know that grandma was going to bed in raptures. Surely anything that had made the dear old lady so happy must be very right.

And then, too, how absurd to be indifferent to her own wonderful good fortune! She recalled the handsome, proud face that had softened with a look of tenderness, and thrilled at the thought of being loved so well. The girl, rich in noble impulses, felt that she must bring out the best treasure from the storehouse to repay such a great devotion.

“I shall be very happy when I wake up to-mor-

row," she thought, as she closed the window. "A night's sleep will clear my brain, and I shall fully realize all my blessings when I get up. Dear old grandma is often right; she always said I confused myself with day-dreams. And Alfred means to put an end to day-dreaming. Well, he must have his own way, of course; and I dare say I shall develop into a practical woman. There will be a great deal of work to do; my new life won't be a lazy life."

She turned away from the window just as the first drops of a heavy shower came dashing against the panes. The lamplight was shining on the pictures, finished and unfinished, at which she had worked so lovingly in her quiet mornings, and she remembered all Mr. Lazelle's kindly criticisms and predictions of success. Grandma was not a rich woman; Tracy had never expected to have a fortune, but had always thought of her future life as the life of a hard-working artist. Already she had earned money enough to pay for most of the pretty things that she wore. The water-lilies had been utilized, and would appear, with appropriate verses, on the pages of a gift-book published by an art firm. She might paint and draw still when she became Lady Montjoy; but the need for labor would be ended.

Again she congratulated herself on her good fortune, and thought how true and disinterested was the love that she had won.

After one more glance round the studio she turned down the lamp, and crossed the passage to her bedroom. And then, wondering still what the waking to-morrow would be like, she fell asleep, and rested as quietly as a child.

The next day dawned fresh and glorious after a night of rain; and the soft air that entered through open windows was rich with the sweet scent of dripping leaves. There was a mellow light in the sunshine which told that autumn had come at last, stealing over the land in the night-time. Tracy sat

up in bed, and felt the kiss of the warm morning, realizing that everything would wear a new aspect now. Nothing looked the same as it had looked before she had engaged herself to Alfred Montjoy; and perhaps the most striking of all the changes was in Barbara, who bustled about the room in such an obsequious manner that Tracy felt inclined to hit her.

Already grandma had told the news, and Barbara was overwhelmingly deferential. She eyed Tracy in a sidelong, submissive fashion, as if she feared that her young lady would pay her back for all her old worryings and lecturings. She could not forget that she had commented in disrespectful terms on Miss Tracy's hasty method of darning stockings. On several occasions she had expressed her opinion of Miss Tracy's naughty ways with a freedom which was terrible to think of. All the dreadful things that she had said in her blind ignorance of the future came back to harass her now, and she was afraid even to utter a word of congratulation.

"Barbara, what makes you amble so?" asked Tracy, with genuine astonishment. "Have you been breaking any of grandma's china cups again? If so, you won't mend the matter by prancing round and round my bed."

Then Barbara, struggling against her fears, endeavored to say something appropriate to the occasion; and Tracy, checking an impulse to laugh at her, received the awkward speech with graciousness. She must adapt herself to her new life! The old unrestrained girlhood was gone, and all at once her heart swelled with apprehension. There were new duties to be revealed and brought close: there was the new love to be requited, the new path to tread to-day.

She was happy, but not quite as happy as she had expected to be. Something that was not a doubt, but which might take that shape at any moment,

was hiding deep in her mind, and she tried to forget that it was there. But when she went downstairs and saw Mrs. Taunton beaming at the breakfast table, she could not help rejoicing too.

No one had ever seen the stately old lady so moved with delight. Her talk rippled on continuously like a joyous little stream; there was so much to be said, and there would be so many people to say it to. Laura must be written to at once, and must be asked to come and stay with them for a few days, if she could be spared from her home.

"We must not let her imagine that she is slighted," said grandma, out of the fulness of her content. "Of course, poor thing, she must feel as if a great gulf had opened between you two; and it will be your part to bridge it over. I cannot help the difference in the two matches. She *would* marry Frank Dawley, and I am sure I never encouraged him. Some girls lose their heads when they get a lover; that was just the case with Laura: she never stopped to think if he was the right man, but rushed with him straight to the altar at once."

"There is a great deal of good in Frank," Tracy remarked. "And they get on together very well."

"Oh, yes; but he is a little uncouth sometimes," said Mrs. Taunton. "I wonder what Sir Alfred will think of him?"

"Does it matter what Sir Alfred thinks of him?" Tracy asked. "He will not have much to do with Laura's husband. Nothing will ever change my opinion of Frank; he is a kind-hearted fellow."

"But if Sir Alfred happens to take a dislike to him, you must not be his champion, my dear."

Tracy laughed, but her cheeks flushed suddenly. "Oh, Frank doesn't want any champion," she said lightly. "He is happy enough not to care too much what people think. I don't suppose he will stand in awe of Sir Alfred."

"Tracy, I hope—I *do* hope that you will not make

light of Sir Alfred's position. You must always maintain his dignity in these Radical days."

"I am a Radical, grandma," rejoined Tracy calmly. "I told Alfred so last week."

Mrs. Taunton aged five years in a moment. She sank back in her chair with a groan.

"Tracy," she said at last in a deep contralto voice, "why will you trifle with your happiness? If you repeat that dreadful assertion, you may lose him altogether."

This time Tracy's laugh was unequivocal. She was very much amused.

"O grandma, you talk as if he was something slippery that would slide away if I did not hold it fast! If I do lose him, you may be quite sure it won't be because I am a Radical."

"Let us return to Laura," said grandma briskly. "As I was saying, you or I must write to her to-day."

"Then you shall write." Tracy came to the old lady's side, and arranged her cap-ribbons with little caressing touches which were not without effect. "If I did it, I should be undignified, and she would not be properly impressed. I am not always to be trusted with a pen; I am like the mediums who write things which don't express their own thoughts at all. In short, I am the sport of a thousand invisible forces which possess me one after another and control my faculties. You, grandma, are always yourself. You always know what you want to say, and you say it."

"That is quite true, my dear. I wish you were more like me," Mrs. Taunton said complacently.

"Perhaps I shall be like you later on, who knows?" and Tracy left her with a kiss.

She ran away upstairs to the studio, and shut herself in. What sort of world would the world be now? Things were forcing themselves upon her one after another; her own little sphere, in which she had

been living peacefully, had been broken into, and was hers no more. There were some richly colored leaves, in a china bowl, waiting to be studied; and she put them into a favorable light, and sat down to draw.

For a little while she worked, trying to recapture the old pleasure in her occupation. The leaves were to form a margin for a graceful figure of Autumn—a woman in a russet robe, carrying red apples in the folds of her gown—but after putting in a few touches she flung the pencil aside. Then she got up, and stood before the picture of her knight.

“I cannot leave you behind,” she said, “when I go to a new home. There must be a nook some where to hold my first hero in my house and in my heart.”

CHAPTER XI.

ST. MONICA'S.

"And again to the vaulted church I went,
And I heard the same sweet prayers,
And the same full organ-peals upsent,
And the same soft, soothing airs;
And I felt in my spirit so drear and strange,
To think of the race I ran,
That I loved the lone thing that knew no change,
In the soul of the boy and the man."

—A. C. COXE.

IT was one of those golden afternoons in October which idealize the crowded streets of the city; a day when lanes and alleys open out into narrow spaces of rich light, and the dome of St. Paul's lifts itself solemnly into a sun-colored haze. The pigeons that nestle among the cornices and soot-begrimed ornaments of the great cathedral were flying in flocks over the trees and green grass on the eastern side. Mr. Lazelle, turning away from the bustling crowds, went in through the open gates and stood beside the fountain. Down came the pigeons with soft flapping and fluttering, some of them perching on the edge of the basin, some pecking at grain scattered for them on the ground, all perfectly at home and at ease among the loiterers who sat or stood in this serene enclosure. He lingered there for a minute or two, enjoying the sense of repose which never failed to come to him in that spot—a repose which was deepened by the consciousness that the throng and bustle were so near.

The rector of Ferngate was a Londoner by birth, and the mighty church was as dear to him as to the

very birds which had made their home under its shadow. But if he had ever had any ambition, he had parted with it early in life; and, instead of clinging to London and its associations, he had gone away contentedly to the sleepy old country town where there were few changes and few difficult duties. Sometimes, when a denizen of the larger world came straying down to Ferngate, he was surprised to find that the rector took a keen interest in the onward march of the age. Mr. Lazelle might seem to be standing still, but he always knew that other people were moving.

With his usual heavy tread he slowly ascended the broad steps and entered the cathedral; and there he rested for a little while in the quietness and gloom. Then, moving deliberately across the nave, he came out again by another door, descended the steps, and plunged into the crowded thoroughfares once more. Still slowly and quietly making his way through the hurrying crowds, he walked along Cannon Street; and many a bustling man of business gave a passing look at that tall, portly figure and venerable face.

Still plodding on, he passed the great railway station at last, and ascended the slope of the busy street before he crossed over to the other side. And then, by the closed door of an old church he stopped a moment, looking up at the list of services framed and hung outside. A smile, affectionate and satisfied, played about his kindly mouth as he recognized the handwriting on the list; every word was traced boldly and firmly, every letter was distinctly formed; there was not, he thought, a single indication of weakness.

“Everything that he does is well done,” he said to himself. “Even his writing shows the pains-taking character of the man; yes, and the sweetness of his nature, for there are no sharp turns and ugly angles. I may well be proud of my boy.”

He turned into a narrow passage running between the side of the church and a row of dark warehouses and back-doors, and opening out into a triangular space. Here was all that remained of the old church-yard of St. Monica's; a grimy garden protected by iron railings, and kept in such decent order that the green things growing there did really manage to flourish to a certain extent. The ferns, which had made a brave struggle for existence, would hardly have been acknowledged by their kinsfolk in the country; and as Mr. Lazelle gave them a passing glance he thought of the plumpy fronds that feathered out luxuriantly over the wayside banks at home. A flagged path, dividing the garden into two parts, led straight to the door of a high house distinguished from its neighbors by an oriel window over the entrance. London smoke had already given quite a venerable aspect to this house, and yet it had only been built a few years.

The outer door stood open, as a rule, all through the day; but the inner door was kept closed, and was provided with four panes of glass, which admitted light into the dark entry, and afforded the housekeeper a glimpse of callers before she let them in. When the rector rang the bell the face of a rosy old woman appeared behind this little window.

"Mr. Linn is not in at present, sir," she said, in answer to his inquiry. "But he'll come home at five, and then I shall take up tea. Won't you go upstairs and wait, sir? It's past four."

Mr. Lazelle hesitated. To tell the truth, the day was so fine that he regretted going indoors. But he had walked a good way, and his limbs reminded him that he was no longer a young man.

"I feel I have a pair of legs," he said, entering. "Ah, Mrs. Deale, I never thought about my legs ten years ago!"

A dark staircase led up to the room which Wilmot Linn used as a study and sitting-room in one. In

the oriel window overhanging the garden was a writing-table covered with papers, and in front of it stood the only easy-chair. There were many books but no ornaments; and although the apartment was comfortable, its appointments were severely plain, and seemed to speak of the simple tastes and ascetic habits of its occupant.

Mr. Lazelle sat down in the solitary easy-chair, and leaned back with a sigh of satisfaction. Even here the golden glory of the afternoon had not quite departed, and he could see a faint glow above the tall roofs of the neighboring houses. The outlook was not very inviting in its aspect; below was the dingy garden with all its grave-yard associations, and beyond it rose the north wall of the church, with scarcely a foot of its gray stone seen through the sooty blackness which had been gathering over it for years. And yet, if St. Monica's had been staring white it would have offended the eye of the gazer; it stood up, dignified by its sable drapery, in as dim a nook as could well be found in the deep heart of the great city.

The rector leaned his head on the stuffed back of the chair, lost in contemplation. Then, after a little while, he looked slowly round the room, as if to see if it had any new features to present to his notice. But there was nothing new. Two or three men's portraits hung over the mantel-piece, and a photograph of himself occupied a conspicuous position. No fair girl's face anywhere; no trifling indication of any interest in women or their ways; not even a love-song among the music-sheets lying on the top of the piano.

"He has devoted himself to his work, body and soul," said the rector to himself. "Two-and-thirty to-day—an age when most men cease to be prodigal with their affections. I wonder whether he will ever permit himself to fall in love again! But there are loves that burst unexpectedly into flower

in the autumn of life, just when we have given up all thought of seeing such blossoms. A deep nature, like Wilmot's, is capable of taking us all by surprise."

From thinking, the good rector drifted gradually into dreaming; his eyes closed, and he fell into a placid sleep.

The opening of the door aroused him, but not with a start. Wilmot Linn was a man who always moved gently and deliberately; accustomed to go into the presence of sickness and sorrow, he had acquired that rare quietness of manner which brings repose instead of breaking it. A certain fine instinct, which never deserted him, had told him that his old friend was dozing in the easy-chair, and he had entered so softly that Mr. Lazelle did not fully awake till Wilmot was standing by his side.

The vicar of St. Monica's was, as has been said, thirty-two years of age; his face was pale and very striking, though not handsome according to rules. Taken singly, not one of his features came up to a moderate standard of perfection, yet the countenance was a most attractive one. His eyes, sad, but steadfast, were deep-set, and shaded by black lashes; and so swiftly did they change from blue to gray that no one could pronounce a decided opinion on their color. The mouth indeed might be called beautiful in its delicate chiselling; but the lips were perhaps too thin, and the square jaw and clean-cut chin gave the impression of an inflexible will. The dominant trait was a strong intellectuality, and the face in repose was almost stern in its high and noble calmness. But to see Wilmot Linn smile was to love him. That smile, sweet as summer, persuasive as a sunbeam, made you forget at once that you had ever thought him cold.

Mr. Lazelle, now wide awake, looked up at the tall, commanding figure beside him, and spoke with a ring of hearty feeling in his tone;

"Well, Wilmot," he said, "I am here to wish you many happy returns of the day."

"You have made this birthday happy by coming to me," Wilmot answered gratefully.

He spoke in just the kind of voice which one would have expected to hear from him, calm and sweet, and with a remarkably distinct utterance.

The housekeeper entered, bringing a lighted lamp into the room, and a little maid in a prim white cap and apron followed with the tea-tray. When the blinds were drawn down and the servants had gone out, Wilmot began to fill the cups; and the rector, turning his chair toward the table, sat and watched him.

"One feels the need of a woman's presence at a tea-table," he remarked, as Wilmot handed him a cup. "Do you mean still to persist in leading this lonely life? Is there no shadow of turning?"

"I am contented," said Wilmot quietly. "What more would you have?"

"But the heart has its needs, Wilmot. Are you not conscious of a void?"

"Yes." The steadfast eyes were turned upon Mr. Lazelle with an intensity of expression which arrested his attention at once. "But I will walk alone all my days rather than choose the wrong companion. Remember my early mistake."

"It was a very common mistake, my dear boy," said the rector earnestly. "Eloise was beautiful; and she had, too, the nameless grace which is more attractive than beauty. I have only seen one woman as graceful as she was."

"And I have never seen one," replied Wilmot calmly. "She was gifted with a peculiar witchery of look and movement which haunts my memory still. It was the charm of the born actress—the power of simulating the highest kind of emotion. She was always false in feeling, and always true in expression."

"Is it possible that you have never forgiven her?" the rector asked.

Wilmot Linn laughed gently.

"I forgave her long ago," he answered. "Just run over the details of the story in your mind. Remember the consummate skill with which she blindfolded me while she was captivating Lord Winterburn; it was not until the captivation was complete, you know, that she unbound my eyes. Afterward—well, afterward he rejected her, and she went on the stage. You remember her triumphs and successes—the laurels were fairly won, and she deserved them all; not less did she deserve the wealthy husband who had loaded her with diamonds. I saw her in the park last July, smiling, satisfied, beautiful still. Eloise is anything but a failure."

"I have no patience with that woman," said the rector, with unusual irritation.

"I have," rejoined Wilmot, in his quietest tone. "She had certain cravings, and she has satisfied them. And I am grateful to her for setting me free—more grateful than words can say. The glamour of her witchery would not have lasted long; and I must have married her, enchanted or disenchanted, if she had not deserted me. When I think what life might have been with her, I feel that there are blessings hidden in loneliness."

"And you have your work," Mr. Lazelle said. "You have built your heart into the stones of old St. Monica's."

"Not into the dead stones," the vicar replied; "but into the living stones, yes. My boys and girls fill every hour of my life; the children of St. Monica's must be as 'the polished corners of the temple.' Come into the church with me this evening, and see them putting the last touches to the decorations for the harvest festival."

"I shall be glad to come, Wilmot."

"I was your boy, you know," Linn went on.

"What should I have been without your helping hand?"

"There would have been other helping hands, Wilmot. You were predestined to rise, sooner or later."

"I might have had to wait a long time if you had not raised me," said the vicar, with that rare smile of his. "And I love to help others as you helped me. What a mistake it is to be always looking inward instead of outward! If we really want to know what we are, we must turn to the lives that are nearest to us, and see ourselves reflected in them. A month's fasting and meditation in a lonely cell would not teach me as much of myself as I can learn in half an hour from these young men and maidens who are committed to my charge."

The gray house with the oriel window was known in the neighborhood as the Clergy House, and here lived Wilmot Linn with two young curates, and a youthful organist trained by himself. Not one of them had taken any vow of celibacy, nor did the vicar impose any stern restraint upon his fellow-workers. He always looked forward to a possible future, not far distant, perhaps, when his companions would fall in love and get married, and live elsewhere. He was a man who encouraged love-making and matrimony; only, as he often said, he wanted his couples to be "divinely married."

Mr. Lazelle had engaged a room in the great hotel at the railway station close at hand; but he was easily persuaded to dine with Wilmot Linn. Mrs. Deale did her best, and served up such a satisfactory little dinner that the good rector ceased to lament over the shortcomings of a bachelor household.

Afterward, when the autumn night had settled down dark and chill over sleepless London, the two went out together through the melancholy little garden, and entered the old church by a door under the tower.

The church was one of Wren's, built in the Roman Renaissance style, and remodelled, later on, with

questionable taste; yet the influence of time, and the strong coloring of rich windows here and there, had done much for St. Monica's. But now there were lights burning, touching the golden broidery on the altar cloth and shining on the organ pipes; and as Mr. Lazelle moved slowly up the middle aisle, two or three groups of young people parted to left and right, and afforded him a view of their handiwork. Careful hands had arranged the russet wheat-ears, heaping up purple grapes and amber gourds and crimson apples, blending them with delicate wreaths and clusters of autumn leaves.

Wilmot Linn stood among "his children," as he loved to call them, and there was a peculiar radiance and sweetness on his face. His was not a maimed life; he was free to use all the forces within him, free to answer the call of every divine motive; the soul, unfettered by any irksome earthly tie, had chosen the atmosphere it loved best. And his oldest friend, watching him with observant eyes, no longer regretted the solitary career of the man.

"Do you not see that my life is well ordered?" Wilmot said, when they were alone together once more. "I know it is an old wish of yours that I should find a mate; but it may not be in this world that I shall find her. What the soul seeks it shall surely find, and when we come to our own we shall know each other."

"You are right," the rector answered; and they parted for the night.

When he lay down to sleep Mr. Lazelle found himself haunted by those last words. More than half of the matrimonial blunders made every day are due to the impatience of men and women, looking for their affinities. Better the long waiting, better even the lifetime of loneliness than the hasty choice. And Wilmot was not one of those who could make the best of a bad lot; he had had such a clear vision of the highest, that he could not be contented with anything else.

CHAPTER XII.

LADY MONTJOY'S VIEWS.

"I would that that you were all to me,
 You that are just so much, no more;
Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free!
 Where does the fault lie? What the core
O' the wound, since wound must be?"

—BROWNING.

THE October day, which had seemed so pleasant to Mr. Lazelle in London, was unspeakably dreary and sad to Lady Montjoy in the country. She sat listlessly in the library all the afternoon until she was crushed down by a heavy weight of depression.

The great house with its many empty rooms had become a horror to her; mysteries seemed to grow in the dense shrubberies outside; and behind the dark woods the sunset glowed with a melancholy crimson light. It was half-past four o'clock. Sir Alfred was sitting in a deep arm-chair by the fire, his dog at his feet, his newspaper in his hand, and his mother was staring absently out of the window.

Presently she gave a long sigh and looked at him askance; but his gaze was fixed on the paper. Then she got up, pacing the room impatiently; and the rustle of her gown at last succeeded in rousing him.

"Don't fidget so, mother," he said.

"I can't sit still when I am restless and anxious," she answered with another sigh.

He glanced up raising his eyebrows slightly.

"It seems to me, mother, that you are unreasonable," he remarked. "There is no need for anxiety."

There was a pause; a flame shot suddenly from

the low fire, and the dog got up, eyed her doubtfully, and curled round at his master's feet again.

Lady Montjoy was in a passion. Experience had taught her that to be in a rage is sufficient weakness, but to show your fury is to insure defeat. She steadied her voice, and spoke very calmly.

"I am afraid there is cause, Alfred."

There was another chair on the other side of the fire, and she sat down and faced him. He moved a little uncomfortably in his seat.

"I suppose you think I have been spending too much money," he said, dropping the paper, and passing his hand across his forehead. "The improvements have cost a good deal, I'll admit. But it wouldn't have been possible to live here without them."

"It would have been impossible, for instance, to live here without building that romantic new cottage on the lake," she observed, with quiet bitterness.

Sir Alfred colored. Then he leaned forward in his chair, and pulled the dog's ears uneasily.

"Supposing the cottage to be a bit of sentimental extravagance, what then?" he asked. "Every man commits some folly when he falls in love."

She was silent. He looked up and saw her sitting calmly before him in her widow's weeds. She was a handsome woman still, looking ten years younger than her age: upright and tall, with clearly cut features, and teeth that were still beautiful; and on her face was stamped indelibly that quiet pride which had outlasted the fleeting expressions of youth. Sir Alfred admired his mother; he had always, even when a boy, been proud of her. Her vigor and beauty had shone out beside his father's weakness and sickliness.

"Something has upset you," he said, breaking the pause. "I thought you would get accustomed to the old place, and learn to like it. We used to dream of these days when we were wanderers abroad."

"Not of these days, Alfred." Her voice trembled.
"Not of any days like these."

He looked at her a little wonderingly, and then at the fire, as if he were considering a problem.

"I wish you had come earlier," he said suddenly. "There is a melancholy look about the grounds now; and you are not used to an English autumn."

Lady Montjoy did not change her position. She still sat upright in the chair, one white hand resting on its arm, the other lying in her lap.

"I wish I had come earlier," she repeated slowly. "Yes, Alfred, I do wish it indeed. If I had been here sooner I should have seen that you were being entangled and have given you a warning. But there was no one to warn you."

Sir Alfred kicked the dog away, and got up. She had expected him to take fire, and was prepared.

"Now look here, mother," he began.

"Look here" was always the beginning of one of his rare bursts of eloquence. He cleared his throat, and went on:

"If you had been here sooner I should have fallen in love with Tracy all the same. My hour was come I suppose. There was no entanglement in the case; I just saw her, and lost my heart at once, that's all. I dare say you think that I fell in love because the place was dull, and I had nothing to do; but if I had met her in a crowd I should have done the same thing. A man's mother is pretty nearly sure to hate the girl he loves; but I thought you would be more sensible than most mothers. Understand this—and it will spare us all future arguments—that nothing which you can say will change my feeling about Tracy."

He was as fiery and resolute as she had thought that he would be. When he had finished his speech he sat down in the easy-chair again, and sank back with the air of one who had settled a troublesome

matter. The collie, too, seemed to think that there would be no more disagreements, for he came back quietly to his old place at his master's feet.

"You are your own master, Alfred," Lady Montjoy said, in a tone of resignation. "I do not dispute your right to please yourself; but, as a mother, I may surely claim the right of telling you what I think of your choice."

"It won't make any difference," he declared in a voice that was half fretful and half weary. "On the whole, mother, I thought you received the news of my engagement very well. Why are you going to be disagreeable when it's too late?"

"Because I see many things which you cannot and will not see," she answered. "Because I know you better than you know yourself. You will get tired of the woman you marry—nothing will alter that, and therefore you may as well marry Lady Catherine Dare as Tracy Taunton."

"If you persist in talking nonsense, mother, I shall go out of the room."

"Don't go just yet, my dear boy; listen to my 'nonsense' patiently for a few minutes, and then I will hold my peace."

Lady Montjoy spoke in a pleasant fashion. She had got herself well in hand now, and was not to be turned from her purpose by any angry speeches. Alfred looked up, and met the good-humored gaze of her hazel eyes—eyes which were not so melancholy as his own, although his were like them in shape and color. He settled himself in his chair with sulky submission.

"You know that Lady Catherine came home under my care," she went on. "I left her safely with her people, and we had a good deal of talk about you. I am sure that you would have been very well received in that quarter. Don't get irritated, Alfred; it is pleasant to an old woman to see that her son is appreciated."

"You are not an old woman yet, mother," he said, somewhat mollified.

"I won't bore you by describing my feelings when I came here," she continued. "I had only been in this house an hour or two when you told me that you were engaged, and——"

"I wanted to get it over," he interrupted.

"Yes; I can understand that. You were quite right; I liked your straightforwardness," Lady Montjoy said affectionately. "But, O Alfred, do forgive me for saying that I was disappointed! If you put the matter seriously to yourself, can you not see that you are really doing a most romantic thing? Could any reasonable being have expected that Miss Taunton would secure such a prize?"

"Well, mother, she is really a very uncommon girl. The girls who attract men are very seldom appreciated by their own sex. You never can imagine what we see to admire in the woman who takes our fancy. But Tracy has a peculiar charm of her own."

"I do not deny the charm, Alfred. She is not a beauty, of course—Lady Catherine Dare is far handsomer—but there is something fascinating about Tracy Taunton. Only I am surprised at her influence over you. And I don't think the marriage will be a success."

"Why should it not be a success?" Sir Alfred demanded.

"Because people who marry for love always quarrel," replied his mother calmly. "They can't help it, you know. They expect too much from each other."

Her son looked at her for a moment, and a slight smile of amusement curved his lips.

"It is quite true," she said gently, inclining her head at him. "Nothing wears worse than a great passion; it is warranted *not* to stand the wear and tear of married life. There is profound wisdom in

Mrs. Malaprop's remark, "Tis safest in matrimony to begin with a little aversion."

"It is a wisdom which I don't intend to put to the test," responded Alfred, laughing. "Why, mother, how long have you entertained these cold-blooded notions?"

"Ever since I became a woman of the world," she answered. "When you have had your dream out, my dear boy, you will be sorry that you did not take the girl who never attracted you. When custom has destroyed Tracy's witchery, you will sigh regretfully after Catherine's money-bags."

He laughed again, and shook his head.

"Remember that I don't expect you to believe me. But it is a relief to a mother to tell a few plain truths to a son. There is one more truth which I should like to tell you, Alfred."

"Go on, mother; now that you have begun, don't stop till you have said all that you want to say. I'm very well amused, I assure you."

But Lady Montjoy did not go on at once. She paused, and her white jewelled fingers grasped the arm of the chair convulsively. She knew that there was one arrow left in her quiver which would not fail to hit the mark and rankle in the wound.

"Alfred, that girl does not really care for you. There is no response to your passion. It was her grandmother who induced her to accept you."

He started from his seat with an oath, and his handsome face was deformed with rage.

"Mother, you have gone too far," he said, in a choked voice. "Tracy is not the girl to be talked over by anybody on earth. And she is as true as daylight; if she had not loved me she could not have told me so."

Lady Montjoy was pale, but she did not lose her composure.

"You must forgive me, my dear," she went on in a quiet tone. "I do not mean to insinuate that

Tracy is untruthful. When she told you that she loved you she had worked herself up into that belief, and she is honestly trying to give you love for love. But she can't change her nature, Alfred, and she is one of the most peculiar girls I ever met. It seems to me that she is always craving after some unattainable spiritual companionship. I don't profess to understand her mind; she soars too high for me. But I am sure that she undervalues all that you offer her."

The truth in these words wrung an unwilling response from the man who heard them. It was a silent response; not for the whole world would Alfred have admitted to his mother that she was right. He asked her, with elaborate courtesy, if she had finished? And when she said that she had he went out of the library into the hall. A minute later she saw him walking down one of the long paths that seemed to open out into the sunset.

It was just the hour when an autumn landscape wears its saddest aspect. Mists were rising from the lake; yellow leaves were dropping from the trees; the crimson gloom of evening was fading above the wood-crowned hills. Alfred recalled the sweet voice that had praised old Woodcourt until he had learned to love it. How plain it was to him now that the place owed its charm to her! And yet, as he paused by the margin of the water, an angry doubt was burning in his heart. Had he not been a fool to give so much and got so little in return? Who was Tracy, that she should value a Montjoy so lightly? He set his teeth savagely and muttered to himself that he would yet teach her the worth of her prize.

CHAPTER XIII.

MISGIVINGS.

“And do the hours slip fast or slow,
And are you sad or gay?
And is your heart with your liege lord, lady,
Or is it far away?”

—MRS. CRAIK.

THESE autumn days which Lady Montjoy, always fuming inwardly, found so unendurable, were not quite peaceable to Tracy.

The long, bright summer had died in a splendor of color and passion of storm, and strong winds had swept away the first fringes of October foliage; but after the tempests there was a great calm. The days were still; crimson leaves pattered softly down in grandma's garden; there were quiet evenings, gray and golden; and the sober tints of asters gladdened the desolate flower-beds. From her childhood, Tracy had been wont to love the fall of the leaf; but now a vague unrest was troubling the peace of autumn.

She knew that Lady Montjoy did not like her. In the carefully trained voice she could hear a grating note; in the cold eyes she could detect a smoldering fire of hate. Yes, of hate. Lady Montjoy was a woman who cherished implacable resentment when her plans had been thwarted, and Tracy had spoiled her best-laid scheme.

Sir Alfred, to do him justice, had not suspected the bitterness of his mother's disappointment. She had received the news of his engagement with an

outward calm, which had deceived him into thinking that she was satisfied. Had she not always said that he must marry one day? And did it greatly matter who the bride was, so long as she was presentable and a gentlewoman? He was not mercenary; he had not meant to marry for money; but then he had never known the want of money. Travelling about from place to place, while Woodcourt was going quietly to decay, he had not realized that a day would come when things would have to be set in order. He was vaguely aware that he must fill his position as a leading man in the county; but he had never thought of counting the cost of his dignity.

As to his mother, he had not deemed it possible that she would quarrel with his choice. "She is sure to like a girl if I love her," he had thought with superb obtuseness. And in truth, Lady Montjoy, like the diplomatist that she was, had never given him a hint about the one she had selected for him. Her coming to Woodcourt had been deferred that she might take charge of Lady Catherine Dare, only daughter of the Earl of Harkfield by his second wife, a rich city heiress. On Catherine Lady Montjoy's hopes were set; she would be, in every respect, a desirable daughter-in-law. And after putting herself to a good deal of inconvenience on this young lady's account, she had found that her son had arranged his own future without consulting her at all.

At first she swallowed her rage, received Tracy affably, and Mrs. Taunton with all due civility. And then she had set herself to watch them both.

By constant watching, and by dint of applying a hundred nameless tests known only to women, she had discovered two things: first, that Tracy was not really in love; and secondly, that it was grandma who desired the match, not the girl herself.

She resented Tracy's indifference bitterly, even while she found in it a "little rift" which might be widened by judicious influence, and hailed it as a

possible means of delivering her son from this undesired alliance. Tracy had presumed to undervalue him. How dared she fail to appreciate the honor that he had done her? Like that luckless duchess whom Mr. Browning has painted for us—

“. . . . She smiled, no doubt
Whene'er he passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile?”

Tracy had no special smile for Alfred. She never gave him that indescribable look, half-shy, half-ecstatic, which is called into a girl's face by the glance of the man she loves. But Alfred, encased in an armor of self-esteem, was not quick in noticing trifles. He had wanted Tracy more than he had ever wanted anything before, and she had promised herself to him. To have what he wanted, this was the law of his life. And he had been well contented with himself and his betrothed until his mother came and sowed the seeds of dissatisfaction.

Jane Shaw's rent was paid, and she and her family had moved away from Long Gardens to a small house on the other side of the common. The new dwelling seemed to agree with little Ben. He had got back the use of his legs, and was able to play with his brother on the waste land, and to bellow as lustily as any boy of his age. It was here that Tracy found him one sunny afternoon, and made him a sign to come to her side. He obeyed the summons readily enough, and she patted his cheek, saying that his roses were coming again.

“Haven't got no roses now,” said the child, with a shake of his curly head. “Left 'em all at Long Gardens. Only got zanthemumps. Come and look at 'em.”

He put his little warm hand into hers, and led her proudly across the uneven ground to the new cottage. There was nothing picturesque about the place, and the chrysanthemums looked very poor

after the lavish display of flowers in the other home. But within doors all was fresh and bright, and Jane came forward with ready words of welcome.

Tracy sat down wearily in a chair by the window, and looked away with wistful eyes to the distant hills. She was always asking herself questions in these days, and never getting any satisfactory answer. Her deeper life, underlying the visible life, was as the troubled sea that could not rest. She had always seen, as she grew to womanhood, a beautiful thing that might possibly come to pass; but now she had lost sight of it altogether. She had put it away from her with her own hands. She had taken the gift that she thought was meant for her, and, in taking it, she had resigned her dearest dream.

Mr. Lazelle had once said that if Tracy ever made some great blunder in life, she would resolutely take its consequences upon herself. It would not be in her to let another person suffer for her mistake if she could help it. Her time had come; she had made her great blunder, and was becoming conscious of what she had done. But, as the rector had foretold, she was willing to bear her own burden. Of one thing she was quite certain: it was her duty to keep her promise at any cost.

"If I had never had a vision of what love might be," she thought, "I suppose I should be satisfied."

But if she had never had that vision she would not have been herself at all, but just a commonplace woman, seeking eagerly for things that perish in the using. The heart contains its own kingdom, and its kings are of its own choosing. If it has high thoughts and pure aspirations, it calls to the highest, saying, "Come and reign over me."

"Miss Tracy," said Jane sadly, "you are looking very tired. I hoped you would bring a brighter face to my new home."

"You moved into the new home very quickly," said Tracy, looking at her with questioning eyes;

"would you not trust Sir Alfred's promise to mend Long Gardens?"

"Well, miss, you know the old saying, 'While the grass grows, the horse starves.' And while we were waiting for the improvement of Long Gardens little Ben would have got worse and worse. We did what we thought right, miss, and we acted as the rector advised," added Jane, making a vain effort to untie a knot in her apron-string.

"Oh, did Mr. Lazelle advise you to move?" Tracy asked, a faint flush of vexation coming into her cheeks. "He did not tell me that he had been consulted. Sometimes, Jane, I think that my old friends are changing: they seem to make mysteries out of nothings. In the old days we were all free and open with each other."

"There always will be old days and new days, miss," said Jane, with another pull at the stubborn string. "And we must just make the best of both. But if the days change, the friends don't. The rector's just as fond of you as he ever was."

"I don't know." Tracy looked absently out through the open window again. "I think he was fonder of the naughty little girl of the old time. Jane, it is not very long ago since I was twenty-one, is it? I suppose I lost the last bit of girlhood on that day when I tried to steal the lilies. Ever since then, I have been staggering along under a weary weight of womanhood and worldly wisdom. As a matter of fact, I am so old and wise that even Ben can't make a playmate of me any more."

Jane tugged at the string, broke it, and impatiently tossed the apron away to a chair. Little Ben stood looking at the two women with astonished blue eyes: he could not tell what to make of them.

"Ben, go and kiss Miss Tracy," said his mother, with a sudden inspiration.

The child needed no second bidding. In a moment he had sprung into her arms, and was pressing his

soft cheeks to hers. Tears gathered in Tracy's eyes as she held him close to her breast; she felt as if she could unburden her heart to Ben better than to any one else.

"Grandma is so—so unsympathetic," she said, with a catching of her breath. "That is why I always feel foolish and break down when I come here. Dear grandma means well, but she talks about my good fortune till I am inclined to long for ill luck. Anything would be more tolerable than the assurance that I am envied by the whole county. Ought I to be all the happier because other people are made miserable by the thought of me?"

"Don't vex yourself with unprofitable questions, miss," Jane answered. "It makes my heart ache to see you so unlike yourself. It's your old freedom that you're pining for, miss, you always did hate to be tied to anything."

"But I ought to like being tied," said Tracy.

"The cord binds, but the magnet draws," Jane spoke in a dreamy tone. "You have held out your hands for the cord, but you should have waited for the magnet."

"Why do you tell me that when it is too late?" Tracy asked mournfully. "But no one's words would have made any difference, I suppose. Grandma was set on it, you know; and I dare say it will turn out well," she added, getting up with the air of one who is resolved to make the best of everything.

When she was gone Jane bustled briskly about the house, trying hard to drive out the anxious thoughts that crowded into her mind. Ever since that bright day when Sir Alfred's figure had darkened her threshold she had been haunted by the fear that his was an evil influence over Tracy's life. She shrank from the thought of contact with this young man who was so handsome and powerful, and her heart

had never rested till she had housed her children under a roof that did not belong to him.

Tracy went home through the waning sunshine, with a weary step and a saddened spirit. And then, when she entered the old room and met grandma's smiling eyes, her soul revived. Dear grandma was so frankly happy; she seemed to have renewed her youth.

They sat down together at the tea-table, the old woman and the young one; and all the familiar pleasantness of home was filling the atmosphere around them. The fire leaped and crackled merrily in the twilight; out-of-doors a soft, gray mist crept over the garden, and the sound of wheels came faintly from the highway to the town. Now and then the dancing firelight touched the silver teapot and glittered on a china cup; sometimes it cast a sudden flash on the old mandarin sitting upon his bracket in a corner, ready to nod on the slightest provocation; and Tracy's glance followed the ever-shifting lights with quiet pleasure.

"O grandma, I wish we could always go on living like this!" she said, with a sigh. "When things are nice I want them to stay so. If there is any movement and change, it breaks up the sense of content."

Mrs. Taunton's brow suddenly clouded.

"My child, how you talk! Do you forget that I am growing old?" she asked. "A girl who is engaged to be married should set her thoughts upon her future home. A home with an old woman is as uncertain a shelter as Jonah's gourd; it may pass away in a night. Your husband's house is a surer dwelling-place than I can give you, Tracy."

CHAPTER XIV.

PALMISTRY.

“Were you thinking how we, sitting side by side,
Might be dreaming miles and miles apart?
Or if lips could meet over a gulf so wide
As separates heart from heart?”

—OWEN MEREDITH.

“‘WHEN the line of heart is broken in several places,’” read Tracy aloud, “‘it means inconstancy both in love and friendship.’ Which *is* the line of heart? I don’t think I have one; and if I haven’t, it’s a sign of iron will, wickedness, and cruelty. Anyhow, I am sure to be in a bad case, for all my lines cross and recross each other in a truly uncanny fashion. On the whole, grandma, I am sorry that my attention has been called to the palm of my hand.”

“So am I,” responded Mrs. Taunton with a dissatisfied glance at the little pink palm held out flat for her inspection. “How a respectable tradesman like Jones can debase himself by selling a hand-book of palmistry, I don’t know! Does he want to make his customers the slaves of a degrading superstition? I shall talk seriously to the rector; he ought to interfere.”

“Oh no, grandma, he won’t interfere. You are always talking seriously to him, you know, and if he listened he would spend his days in interfering. Only fancy what a stupendous nuisance he would be if he did! And you shouldn’t be down upon the

excellent Jones. He just lets the book lie upon his counter, that's all."

"It is very wrong of him to let it lie there. And you ought not to have wasted a shilling on it, Tracy," said grandma severely.

"I have invested in a shilling's worth of discomfort," declared Tracy, with a rueful face. "Can't you see that 'I hold my heart in my hand,' like the young woman in the poem, and I don't know what to make of it? 'If, on starting, the line of the heart is bi-forked, and one branch of the fork rises toward the Mount of Jupiter, it indicates great happiness of a glorious nature; but if the other branch——' I seem to lose myself among the mounts, and I have hundreds of bi-forked branches. When every line is bi-forked, the study naturally becomes confusing."

"You had better burn that book," remarked Mrs. Taunton, with suppressed exasperation.

"'If the line of heart joins the line of life,'" went on Tracy, reading louder, "'between the thumb and forefinger, it is a sign (if the mark is in *both* hands) of a violent death.' Ha! it is all over with me, grandma; my lines *do* join. You will not long be troubled by my unwelcome presence. But, stay, I see a gleam of hope! I am not quite certain that they join in *both* hands. Perhaps I may be let off with 'a serious, but not fatal, illness connected with the heart.'"

"Tracy, how can you be so absurd?" said the old lady, putting down her knitting to give due effect to her words. "When your mind should be occupied with important matters, you devote yourself to the merest frivolities. Now here is Sir Alfred; I hope you are not going to bewilder him with that ridiculous book. Pray put it away at once."

But Tracy turned a deaf ear to Mrs. Taunton's entreaties, and advanced to meet her lover with the book in one hand. The fun of teasing grandma had brought the old wilful light into her eyes, and the

faint rose-tint to her cheeks. She was the same enchanting little witch who had interested the rector and fascinated Frank Dawley years ago. That rare gift of spontaneous gayety, finding vent in graceful expression, was hers still; and as she came forward with her provoking smile, waving the hand-book of palmistry, Sir Alfred confessed to himself that he was as much under her spell as he had been in the first stage of his love affair.

"I don't believe in these manuals," he said, turning over the leaves contemptuously. "If you really want to have your hand read, a true gypsy is the person to do it. It's all rubbish, of course; but some of those gypsy fortune-tellers are awfully clever, and they make a good shot here and there."

"What a lovely suggestion!" cried Tracy, throwing a defiant glance at Mrs. Taunton. "Alfred, you will take me to the tents this very day. You know there is a cosy encampment in the woods, and we can walk there after lunch."

"Tracy, I protest against this nonsense!" Mrs. Taunton said sternly. "I disapprove of all fortune-telling; it is an encouragement to impostors."

"But the world would be so dull without an impostor or two," Tracy pleaded. "I like to be imposed upon sometimes. And, you see, I know just enough about palmistry to muddle my brain; the book is a mistake, and it has left me in a state of bewildering uncertainty. I am driven to resort to the gypsies."

"She will be quite safe," said Alfred, answering grandma's anxious look. "The gypsies have given up child-stealing, you know, and they are great fun. We have the Endons staying with us; they came last night, and Roche arrived early this morning, so we must do something to amuse ourselves."

"Very well," rejoined grandma, in a tone of quiet resignation. "Of course I do not wish to check any harmless amusements, and if you are perfectly sure that they won't molest Tracy afterward——"

A merry ripple of laughter cut short the sentence. Then Tracy kissed her, and arranged her cap-ribbons with the old caressing touch. And Alfred looked at her again, and thought that she was at her sweetest with that blending of archness and tenderness in her delicate face.

His dog-cart was waiting at the door, and they drove away together in the light of a quiet November morning. No wind stirred the russet leaves, nor lifted the thin vapor that hung over low-lying meadows; it was a still day, and its stillness seemed to steal into Tracy's heart, and hush her mirthfulness. When her lover spoke, she gave him a smile and a ready answer; but the sparkle had died out of her eyes. He was half-vexed with the change in her mood.

"What a fitful girl you are, Tracy!" he said.

"I haven't much to say for myself now, have I?" She looked up at him with a gentle glance. "These silent days always influence me. The year is dying in peace, and one does not like to disturb his last hours, poor old year!"

"Why is he to be pitied?" Alfred asked. "A twelvemonth is a long time, and he has had an uncommonly bright life. His sunny days have been many, and his storms few. Only think of the golden summer, Tracy, and the gift that it brought to me!"

It was a perfect speech, uttered with that subdued fervor which seldom fails to win a response. But at that moment Tracy felt stifled, and her lips quivered painfully when she tried to make a reply. The doubt within her had leaped suddenly out of its lurking-place, and stood up, hideous and defiant, between herself and the man by her side. In an instant she had wrestled with it desperately, and crushed it back into its lair. Alfred must be all the world to her now; there must be no regrets for the old days of freedom, no fears for the wearing of the new fetter.

"A very poor gift, I am afraid," she said softly. "Don't over-value me, dear. For your sake, like Portia, 'I would be trebled twenty times myself.'"

He was satisfied with her words; they sounded meek and tender, and seemed all the sweeter from lips that sometimes uttered such proud and wilful things. And then, when the dog-cart turned in at the lodge-gate, and the November sunshine flecked with gold the gray stone mullions of the windows of Woodcourt, and illuminated the mouldering cartouche shield upon the eastern front of the old house, Sir Alfred Montjoy felt himself to be a contented man. On Tracy, too, the atmosphere of the old mansion had a potent influence. She was haunted by all the romantic dreams that had come to her under these trees; she recalled the charm that had invested those shaded walks and alleys in her childhood. Was it not a grand thing (as grandma had said a hundred times) for little Tracy Taunton to be the future mistress of this stately place?

CHAPTER XV.

THE GYPSY.

“I foresee and could foretell
Thy future portion, sure and well;
But those passionate eyes speak true, speak true,
Let them say what thou shalt do!”

—BROWNING.

LADY MONTJOY received her daughter-in-law-elect with rather more than her usual suavity.

Mrs. Endon, a widow, and an old family friend, had come to stay at the Court; and Alfred's mother had been unburdening her mind to this trusted ally. The process had relieved her, and made it easier to smile on Tracy when she came in, her pale cheeks freshened by the morning air, her dark locks curling crisply under a little gray velvet cap. Grace Endon, a society woman of six-and-twenty, advanced with that honeyed manner which so successfully covers the gall beneath. Tracy Taunton was not in the least prettier than Grace had thought; nay, there was not the slightest pretension to beauty in those irregular features; but there was a something—a nameless grace—a style for which Lady Montjoy's description had scarcely prepared her friends.

“We must have lunch early, mother,” said Alfred, with that touch of imperiousness in his tone which Lady Montjoy inwardly resented. “Tracy and I have thought of something to amuse us all. Miss Endon, don't you want to have your fortune told?”

“Yes, that is if it could be truly told,” Grace answered. “Of course I should like to know if anything good is coming to me.”

"Or anything bad," suggested Mr. Roche. "You might avoid the evil if you saw it advancing. How splendid it would be to dodge one's calamities!"

"It's easily done if somebody can read the lines in your hand," remarked Alfred.

"Palmistry? Oh, I don't believe in it in the least!" Miss Endon cried. "Mamma, don't you remember that Mrs. Addison, who took us all in so shamefully?"

"It is great nonsense," rejoined Mrs. Endon. "The craze is fast dying out."

"It won't quite die out so long as there are gypsies in the land," said Montjoy. "They've been at it for centuries, you see; and some of them believe in it so tremendously themselves, that they make other people believe too. There was Finchley, you know; it was an odd thing that a gypsy was right about him."

"What about Mr. Finchley?" Grace Endon asked. "I met him once or twice at the Greshams'. He came unexpectedly into his uncle's fortune, and died a few months afterward."

"Well, a gypsy foretold all that," Alfred answered. "I was with him once at old Deane's place in Berkshire, and we were out on a common one day, when a swarm of gypsy kids came from their camp, and bothered us for pennies. Finchley caught sight of a pretty girl near a tent, and went to have a chat with her, when a gypsy mother turned up, and wanted to tell his fortune. He let her tell it, and laughed at it after it was told. She said there was money in his hand—a great deal of it, coming very soon. He was awfully hard up just then, and nothing seemed so unlikely to come as a fortune."

"Did she foretell his death, too?" inquired Roche.

"She told him that the money would certainly be his, but that he wouldn't enjoy it long. He asked if the riches would take to themselves wings and fly away? And she answered, 'No, but *you* will.'"

"It was a good shot, that was all," said Roche.

"If you are always prophesying, some of your words are sure to come true," remarked Miss Endon. "I dare say the fortune-teller had made more bad shots than good ones in the course of her career. Have you any gypsies in this neighborhood, Sir Alfred?"

"There's an encampment on the edge of the woods," he replied. "If you have no objection, we'll walk there after lunch. I found Miss Taunton puzzling her brain with a hand-book of palmistry, and I proposed that we should try the gypsies instead of the hand-book."

Tracy laughed slightly and made haste to defend herself.

"I was only teasing grandma," she said. "No one could be less in earnest than I was."

The three women were all looking at her as she spoke, and Lady Montjoy veiled her dislike under an indulgent smile.

"Let us go to the encampment by all means," cried Miss Endon, getting up a little enthusiasm. "At any rate, we shall enjoy a walk through those lovely woods. Isn't it delightful to find so much foliage left on the trees? I am told that you are an artist, Miss Taunton; it is just what I have always longed to be. But my poor sketches quite dishearten me."

And the woods were beautiful indeed that day; the winds had been merciful, and there were fringes of gold and scarlet here and there, that were right regal in their richness. Above all hung a sky of faint blue; looking through gaps in the tinted leafage, you caught a glimpse of dim hills, and a gleam of a sweet little river, wandering away to lose itself in the mist.

Tracy wanted to be silent, and bravely exerted herself to talk. Miss Endon was an every-day young lady, neither pretty nor plain, neither clever nor stupid; she had made up her mind that it was her duty to detest Sir Alfred's betrothed: first, because

she *was* betrothed; secondly, because Lady Montjoy had decreed that she was to be detested. But even Grace began to soften a little when her companion put out her powers, and strove to win her. Without flattering her in the least, Tracy contrived to convey a subtle impression of finding Miss Endon agreeable.

Mr. Roche was deeply interested in Miss Taunton, and watched her continually. He felt as if he had known this girl for years; in her voice and manner there was the naturalness of a child, blending with the dignity of a woman; and when she spoke, or looked at him, he recalled all the looks and tones that had been sweetest in his life. Here and there we find some one who possesses this rare gift—the power of touching certain chords within us, and awakening sleeping melodies. It is done without effort or design; the voice steals gently into our hearts, we know not why; the smile warms and revives us like a sunbeam.

They found the encampment in a glade which opened out upon a wide space of heath. The afternoon was just chilly enough for the sight and scent of a wood-fire to suggest comfort; there was the orthodox tripod with the kettle; and a group of several persons, standing and sitting in its immediate vicinity, caught the ruddy light upon their brown faces. A girl, handsome and slim, was keeping up the blaze by the addition of a dry twig or dead branch from time to time; and the glow shone fitfully on her rough, dark hair and russet cheeks, deepening the faded scarlet of the jacket that she wore. There were two sullen-looking men; a lad of fourteen or fifteen; some children; and two women, one still young, and the other past middle age. They all looked up, in a furtive way, as Montjoy advanced with his friends.

“Fine weather for November,” began Sir Alfred, addressing the group in general. One of the men

grunted an assent; the girl in the red jacket gave him a smile which displayed her pearly teeth; and the eldest of the women rose quietly from her seat on the ground.

She stood upright, tall and strong, her dark face framed in a yellow kerchief, knotted under the chin. There was a dignity in her look and bearing which impressed Tracy at the first glance. The woman's deep black eyes travelled swiftly from one young lady to the other, and then her gaze settled on Miss Taunton.

"Will you let me tell your fortune, lady?" she asked, in a voice that was rich and low.

It was a voice that was harmonious by nature, and she spoke in a soft, wooing tone; but the vivid glow of her eyes told of untamed passions and a heart of fire. Years of sorrow and wandering had failed to quench the burning light in those eyes, and Tracy thought how beautiful they must have been when they shone out of a face rich with soft brown tints. The gypsy's skin was copper-colored now, and there were deep wrinkles round the mouth; but you could not look at her without seeing a vision of her lost beauty.

Instinctively the girl stepped a little apart from her companions, and Sir Alfred dropped a half-crown into the woman's palm. Then Tracy held out her ungloved right hand, and the gypsy took it tenderly in her dusky fingers, scanning it with a rapid glance.

"Let me see the left hand, too, lady," she said gently. In silence they stood together under the brown and yellow leaves, Tracy's slender figure, clad, as usual, in soft gray, looking all the daintier beside the gaunt form and dingy garments of the sibyl. Miss Endon had come with the intention of treating the whole business as a joke; Roche was calmly indifferent, and Montjoy had merely wanted to while away an idle hour. But there was something about that dark woman which seemed to magnetize these

three thoughtless persons into utter quietness. Her manner had such a strange power that they waited, in grave silence, to hear her words.

"You will send away many lovers, lady, before you find your true love," said she, in a soft monotone. "It's no false story that you want to hear; there's the love of truth in your hand, and the poor gypsy must tell you true."

She paused, drew herself up to her full height and looked away, with dilated eyes, into the far distance. Then, bending over the little palms again, she went on speaking:

"There are glorious things in your hand; beautiful things that you dream of, and some of those things you'll do. There's the power of swaying hearts as the wind sways the reed, and of drawing loves as the magnet draws the steel. You'll have a great light shining on you, and then a great darkness falling on you. But the light will come again at the close."

There was another pause. Then Miss Endon's curiosity got the better of that strange awe which the gypsy had inspired. She drew a little nearer to Tracy's side.

"The fortune is not half told," she said. "You don't say one word about marriage. We should like to know whether she will be rich or poor, but we want to hear about the marriage, first of all."

The woman glanced coldly at the speaker, and addressed herself to Tracy again.

"I have said nothing about your marriage, lady, because there is no word to be said. I promised to tell you true."

"Oh, this is not fair!" cried Miss Endon, flipantly. "I thought that all you fortune-tellers predicted a speedy wedding, riches, and a long life. Why is she to receive such a scanty measure of good things?"

"I cannot foretell what I do not read," said the gypsy, in her soft, level voice, still keeping her gaze

fixed on Tracy alone. "I see a great love, found after long waiting, and I see that the line of fate breaks at the line of the heart. But it is not only in your hand that your story is written, lady: it is in your face; it shines out of your eyes. Let those who love the earth cling to the earth; their ways are not your ways, nor are their thoughts your thoughts."

"This isn't fortune-telling at all," murmured Roche to Alfred Montjoy. "But the woman is a marvellous actress. Where did she pick up that manner?"

"I speak not to them, but to you, lady," the level voice went on. "In the day of your great anguish remember the words of the poor gypsy. Fear not to tread a lonely path through this world. Be more fearful of the companionship that enchains than of the solitude that leaves you free! When your best is taken, look not back, but press onward! What the eye no longer sees the soul may still follow! Now, lady, I have said enough."

Without any parting salutation she turned, walked deliberately away, and was soon lost to sight in a narrow path which led into the woods. For a few seconds the four young people stood looking after her in silent amazement. Then Alfred, with a touch of annoyance in his manner, went up to the group still gathered round the fire.

"That woman gives herself strange airs!" he said, glancing at the elder of the two men.

The man rose, looked furtively at him out of a pair of shifty black eyes, and answered in a conciliatory tone:

"It's little enough we know of her, mister. That's Esther Lee, and she comes and goes as she likes, without asking leave of any of us."

"Then she doesn't live with you always?" said Miss Endon.

"No, lady! She came last night and sat down among us; and now she's gone again."

"What do you think of the fortune-telling?" Grace Endon asked, with a bantering little laugh.

There was silence for a moment. The girl in the red jacket laughed too, showing her white teeth again. Then the young woman by the tent spoke for the first time.

"Some can tell and some can't!" she said.

"Do you think that Esther Lee can tell?" inquired Roche.

"She's a wise woman; but we don't know much of her," was the reply. And Tracy fancied that there was a general wish to put an end to the conversation.

Finding that there was really very little to be extracted from the gypsies, Alfred turned sullenly away from the camp, and the four friends walked homeward.

CHAPTER XVI.

SEARCHINGS OF HEART.

“Deeper than the gilded surface
Hath thy wakeful vision seen,
Farther than the narrow present
Have thy journeyings been.”

—WHITTIER.

“SHE was rather stupid, after all,” said Miss Endon, as the four walked abreast through one of the wide woodland ways. “She wanted to make a new sensation; but she didn’t do it at all well.”

“I thought she did it rather well,” observed Roche.

“Oh, do you think so? Now I thought she was absurdly tragic!” Grace Endon cried. “She would have impressed me more if she had been matter-of-fact and commonplace. If she had predicted a little every-day happiness I should have been almost tempted to believe in her. But she cut Miss Taunton off from the least hope of any earthly enjoyment, and only promised her a great anguish. In fact, she piled up the agony too high.”

“The woman is mad—that’s at the bottom of it all!” said Alfred Montjoy, switching savagely at the boughs with his stick. “Didn’t you notice the look in her eyes? One of these days she’ll become dangerous.”

He spoke to Tracy, who was walking quietly by his side, and she looked up at him with a glance so calm and sweet that his irritation vanished.

“There was a peculiar look in her eyes,” she admitted. “I think she is one of those people who

see ghosts and hear voices. They are not sane, I suppose; but they are rather interesting."

"They don't interest me. I always want to kick them," said Alfred.

"You do not seem to be frightened by the gloomy picture of your future, Miss Taunton," remarked Grace. "It would have made some persons quite ill. Nervous people are so easily upset by this kind of thing that I think it is a little dangerous."

"Of course it is dangerous," said Montjoy, getting angry again. "I wish I hadn't taken you near the rascals," he added, turning to Tracy.

"But, Alfred, you knew that they did not always prophesy smooth things," she answered gently. "You were telling us about Mr. Finchley before we went out, and I was promised a fair amount of consolation, so it wasn't so very bad after all."

"It's nothing but moonshine!" said Roche, with an air of calm conviction. "And they have a trick with their eyes which is very effective. I remember a book written by some old fellow who lived among gypsies and studied their language and all their ways; his name was Barrow, I believe. He noticed that their eyes had a strange staring expression, which influenced you in an odd kind of way. Miss Taunton's sibyl had got exactly that look. Of course she was an awful old fraud!"

"They are all frauds and brutes!" Alfred declared. "Some old Montjoy was fool enough to give them leave to camp on our land, and I suppose it won't do to take the permission back. But if I had my will they should all be warned off."

"You are too hard on them," pleaded Tracy. "What harm have they done? We need not believe the poor woman's words. And we mustn't forget that she did not seek us. Only think how angry grandma would be if she knew that we were making ourselves uncomfortable about fortune-telling!"

The thought of grandma and her horror of palm-

istry made Alfred laugh; and then, as if by magic, Tracy became suddenly gay. Roche looked at her and listened to her amusing little speeches with wondering delight. She was so bright that almost any other woman would have seemed a little dull beside her; and yet there was always something delicate and fine in her gayety. Miss Endon watched her with stealthy curiosity and drew her own conclusions.

"She doesn't want us to think that the fortunetelling has had any effect upon her," Grace thought. "She tries to charm us into forgetting the episode. With the men she will possibly succeed, but nobody can throw dust in *my* eyes. She was very pale when the gypsy spoke of coming anguish; and yet I don't think she was frightened at all. What an odd girl she is! I haven't fathomed her thoroughly, but I am sure she is acting now."

The first shades of dusk had fallen when they returned to Woodcourt, and as they turned in at the gates, Tracy was conscious of a deadly sense of weariness. Her desperate desire to sustain her part had tinged her cheeks with rose and given her eyes a feverish lustre. Just for a moment, as she walked up one of the long paths leading to the house, she was afraid of breaking down. When she spoke she fancied that there was an unnatural tone in her voice, and wondered if the others would notice it. But they did not. Even Miss Endon failed to detect the fatigue which Tracy was so resolutely bent on concealing. She suspected that Miss Taunton's spirit and gayety were partly sham; but she did not realize the effort that had been made nor the exhaustion that had set in.

They all entered the house, talking and laughing as if no prophetic warnings had ever sounded in their ears, and went straight to the library. They found a fire burning there and some easy-chairs drawn up before it. The two widows were sitting

comfortably together, and tea had just been brought in. Tracy loosened her jacket rather deliberately and sat down, leaning back upon the cushions and finding a certain amount of languid comfort in her position. Alfred brought her some tea, and Roche placed a little table close to the arm of the chair. There would be a blessed interval of rest, she hoped, before the fortune-telling was discussed again.

But the peace was not to last. Lady Montjoy began at once to ask questions. Were they satisfied with the result of the expedition? Had they come home without purses? Were the gypsies very horrid? Had Tracy's fortune been told?

Tracy had fortified herself with half a cup of tea. But it was not necessary for her to speak just then; Sir Alfred eagerly took upon himself the task of answering.

"They're an abominable set!" he said. "Their faces are atrocious. One old fiend got half-a-crown out of me, and in return she looked into Tracy's hand and predicted any number of mysterious horrors."

"Horrors?" Lady Montjoy ejaculated. "My dear boy, what has the woman been saying? Tracy does not look any the worse for it all," she added, with a glance and a smile at the girl by the fire. "I think you have exaggerated."

"Sir Alfred is hardly just to the poor gypsy," said Miss Endon. "In the first place he proffered the half-crown, and in the second I did not hear the faintest whisper of a horror. What I did hear was something about a great love found late; and an anguish, and a darkness, and a light. It was quite poetical, I assure you."

"You don't mean to tell us that a gypsy talked in that strain!" Mrs. Endon cried. "She must have been somebody in disguise."

"Are you serious, Grace?" Lady Montjoy asked. "Let us hear what she really did say. Perhaps she

was a religious enthusiast; gypsies do get converted sometimes, don't they?"

"Never!" said Sir Alfred emphatically.

"My dear Alfred, you are too shocking!" his mother exclaimed. "Now, Grace, pray go on!"

And Grace went on, while Tracy sat still, drinking her tea. Miss Endon repeated the gypsy's words with tolerable accuracy, but they lost all solemnity and poetry in passing through her lips. The two widows listened, ejaculated, and laughed; it was all done to make a sensation, they said; the woman had struck out into a new line. They thought it was rather clever of her. Meanwhile Sir Alfred stood leaning against the mantel-piece, with his gloomy eyes bent on his betrothed.

Just then, when Grace had finished her story, Tracy rose to go. She looked very slender and frail as she stood up in the firelight; but her air of perfect composure and dignity did not desert her for a moment. Perhaps it never occurred to any one save Roche that she had gone through rather a trying afternoon. It could not be pleasant, he thought, to hear one's possible future so freely handled. Even if this fortune-telling business were all nonsense, it must have had some effect on her mind. But the quiet of her manner did not suggest repressed feeling. She seemed a little weary, that was all.

"Oh, are you really going?" said Lady Montjoy affectionately. "Is the carriage here? Mrs. Taunton might have spared you to us a little longer."

"She feels lonely in the evenings if I am not at home," Tracy answered.

Sir Alfred was hovering near his love uneasily, as if he felt that unseen dangers were gathering round her. His duty as a host forbade him to go back to the Laurels in the brougham by her side. He said something in a low voice about her solitary drive, and she responded with a smile which Roche thought charming.

No one heard her deep sigh of relief as the brougham moved away from the hall door. The November evening had come on, misty and still, and the air was full of the faint scent of decaying leaves, crossed by the fumes of peat-smoke. Tracy put down the window and let the damp breath of the night kiss her face; sighing with relief again when they had passed the gloomy lodge weighted by ivy, and were out in the dim, silent road that led home.

The gypsy had peered into the palms of her hands, and had read there no sign of that wedding-day which was supposed to be drawing near. Could she trust those strange black eyes that seemed to see into her future? And what of that great love which was to be found after long waiting?

If the sybil had spoken truly it was a light that would be followed by darkness; a love succeeded by a loss. But one day of perfect communion is sweeter than whole years of imperfect association. The lamp may be shattered, but the true light does not die among its fragments; it rises and shines eternally above the mists of earth.

"I wonder how I shall bear a great sorrow if it comes?" thought Tracy, leaning back in the corner of the brougham. "I have never yet known any sorrow worth mentioning. Nothing in a book is so interesting as a heavy grief. It is sorrow that colors and enriches a story; and when the heroine begins to get over it, you generally feel that you have had enough of her. But if *I* were the heroine, how would it be then?"

Lights were burning in houses and shop-windows as the carriage rolled through the quiet old High Street, and then they came to the courtyard gate, and Barbara's face appeared at the open door.

CHAPTER XVII.

TALKING BY THE FIRE.

“So much for idle wishing—how
It steals the time! To business now.”

—BROWNING.

WHEN the hall door had closed on Tracy, Sir Alfred suggested to Roche that they should repair to the smoking-room. He was still in the very worst of tempers, and the sound of the women's voices seemed to irritate him beyond endurance. They, on their part, hailed the disappearance of the men with profound satisfaction. Even Miss Endon felt that all her little graces would be wasted if they remained.

“Alfred is perfectly infatuated about that girl!” exclaimed Lady Montjoy, when her son was fairly out of hearing. “He never was so disagreeable before he got engaged. What a dreadful mood he is in! I am positively afraid to speak to him.”

“It is very sad to see him so changed,” said Mrs. Endon with a little sigh. Every one who had ever known young Montjoy was acquainted with his temper, which had never been concealed from friends or foes. But Mrs. Endon felt that she must be sympathetic before anything.

“Utterly changed; and it is all her doing! I wish he had chosen *any one* else!”

As Lady Montjoy spoke she glanced across at Grace, who had seated herself in the chair which Tracy had occupied. Grace had unfastened her cloak and thrown it off; it was a pretty, brown cloak, lined with gray squirrel, and as she sat with

its folds falling luxuriously round her, she was conscious that she looked very well—quite well enough to be Lady Montjoy's daughter-in-law. But there was no self-consciousness in her face, and she returned the glance with the most ingenuous candor.

"Perhaps it will never come to anything after all," she said calmly. "One can't tell. If there is any truth in the gypsy's forecasting, Miss Taunton will not marry, I fancy."

She paused. Lady Montjoy's hand, in which she held the sugar-tongs and a lump of sugar, was visibly trembling. Her cold eyes grew curiously bright and eager, and a flush rose to her cheeks.

"Did the woman really predict that there would be no marriage, Grace?" she asked.

"That was how I understood her," Grace replied. "Of course, I wanted to know why she had said nothing about the wedding, and she answered very impressively: 'I cannot foretell what I do not read.' It was rather strange, was it not?"

"It was very strange," Lady Montjoy responded.

As she spoke she left the tea-table and came across to the fire, putting one foot on the fender and shivering a little.

"Are you cold?" Miss Endon asked, involuntarily.

"Not exactly. I had a sudden chilly feeling, that was all," she said. "It would be absurd to put any faith in that gypsy creature, wouldn't it? And yet those people are right sometimes; they have a sort of gift of divination, I suppose. I can't understand it in the least, can you?"

A bright light shot up from the wood-fire and fell upon her face. Grace Endon looked at her in mute amazement, struck with the passionate feeling that it expressed. She had not thought that Lady Montjoy could care very much about anything; and this intense dislike to her son's betrothed seemed almost inexplicable. It was not unnatural, perhaps, that his choice had disappointed her; but what had Tracy

done to be detested so strongly? Grace began to realize that there were depths in this woman's nature which she had never sounded; and yet they had known each other for years.

Perhaps Mrs. Endon was surprised, too. The widows had been playmates and school-fellows, and their early intimacy had never died out, although time and change had separated their lives. There was a quiver in Lady Montjoy's voice which seemed to demand an immediate answer, and Grace did not quite know what to say. She felt almost afraid of holding out any thread of hope for her to cling to; she was more than half sorry that she had repeated the gypsy's words. Her mother came to her aid with quiet tact.

"I don't think any one thoroughly understands divination," she remarked in an inexpressive tone. "It has been talked about and written about a great deal, and we find it in the Bible."

"Yes—we find it in the Bible," echoed Lady Montjoy, catching eagerly at this commonplace sentence. "So, of course, there must be something in it. And you were saying, Grace, that this gypsy was not at all an ordinary woman?"

"Well, no; she was not ordinary," said Grace, with some hesitation. "But, really, I have never studied gypsies and their ways, and every one says that they are a very peculiar people. So that there may be many others like her, you know."

"I don't believe that there are many like her." Lady Montjoy utterly rejected the suggestion. "We saw gypsies abroad, but I never took any notice of them; and I once visited an encampment here with Sir Robert soon after I was married. I am sure that none of them were at all like the woman you describe."

"Mr. Roche said that she was quite remarkable," observed Grace, rather feebly. "I think he has gone in for gypsies; they seem to interest him."

"Then if he thought her remarkable, she must be so!" said Lady Montjoy, with repressed excitement. "Mr. Roche is a very sensible man; I was quite glad that Alfred asked him here. Really, Grace, it is possible that the woman does possess the power of second-sight! And she might have seen——"

Mrs. Endon moved a little uneasily in her seat. She was afraid that her daughter might say too much. It would be a disastrous thing if Lady Montjoy were to build her hopes on such a sandy foundation as a gypsy's fortune-telling. In her heart of hearts, Mrs. Endon firmly believed that the hated match would come to pass. She was a matter-of-fact woman, and had a profound contempt for palmistry and all other forms of prediction. Sir Alfred was desperately in love, and he was too self-willed a man to renounce the object of his passion at any one's bidding. The gypsy had ruffled his temper; but his was a temper that a breath could ruffle. Mrs. Endon did not want him to marry Tracy, of course; she would have gladly seen her own daughter in Tracy's place. But she was not the woman to indulge in vain dreams and expectations, and she simply accepted the inevitable. In her opinion, Lady Montjoy would do well to accept it also. Nothing was ever gained by struggling against the tide.

Grace was not quite as calm as usual. She saw the danger and hardly knew how it was to be avoided. Yet, strange to say, she believed a little more in the gypsy than her mother did. Perhaps this was because she wanted to believe. Perhaps it was because she belonged to a period which has revived the never-extinct love of the occult. Any-way, although she had pretended to sneer at Esther Lee, she had not listened unmoved to her mysterious words.

"It was all very extraordinary," she said in a nervous voice; "I shall never forget the scene—never! I was quite unprepared to hear what I heard. I

thought we should have the old story of love and marriage told in the old way. On the whole, I think our expedition was a failure," she added, with an uneasy little laugh. "No power on earth will ever induce me to go to a gypsy camp again!"

"Grace, how silly you are!" Mrs. Endon said, reprovingly. "Why do you take the matter seriously? You had better dismiss it from your thoughts."

"But, Julia, you did not see and hear as Grace did," remarked Lady Montjoy, turning almost sharply on her old friend. "I think it is quite natural that it should have produced a deep impression on her mind."

Grace rose from her seat and stood up, with flushed cheeks and brightened eyes.

"I'm afraid I am as silly as mamma says," she exclaimed involuntarily. "And perhaps I am worse than silly, for—O Lady Montjoy, I think it would be best for every one if the gypsy were right and the marriage never came to pass at all!"

Mrs. Endon was startled; but this little outburst of nature did her daughter no harm. To Lady Montjoy it seemed so delightfully sympathetic and refreshing that she gave Grace an unexpected kiss. Miss Endon retreated, in some agitation, to her own room; and there her mother came to her an hour later.

Grace was dressed for dinner, and the maid had been dismissed. She was standing before the fire with her hands loosely clasped, wearing a rather peculiar gown of soft crimson and cream color, which suited her very well. In her bodice was a small bouquet of autumn leaves and Gloire de Dijon roses, which matched the hues of her dress. Mrs. Endon had never thought her child a beauty; but at this moment she became almost beautiful.

"My dear," she said suddenly, "I never saw you look so well before. You are very seldom excited, you know. What a pretty gown that is!"

"Yes, it is rather nice," Grace answered absently. Her breath came quickly, and her pale blue eyes looked unusually bright.

"You are excited," her mother repeated. "Sit down for a minute; there is time for a word or two. The fact is, Clara Montjoy has agitated us both. She has quite lost her head about this engagement, but it cannot be helped. Alfred is bent on marrying the girl, and he will marry her in spite of all the mothers in the world."

"Has it never struck you that the girl does not want to marry him, mamma?" asked Grace, who had seated herself obediently, and was resting one little crimson shoe on the brass fender.

"Nonsense, my dear; of course she cares. She puts on that slight indifference because it suits her," replied Mrs. Endon, confidently. "I should say she was a very deep girl."

"You don't understand her, mamma; neither do I," Grace said, gazing into the fire. "But I am sure that she is utterly and foolishly unworldly. She doesn't care for any of the things that you and I have sighed for all our lives. She is a dreamer, and she wants a lover who comes from dreamland. If she marries Alfred she will be perfectly miserable."

"He will soon get tired of her, I dare say," rejoined Mrs. Endon cynically. "Such a violent feeling never lasts. I don't think she will have a long life: there is something fragile about her; they won't get on well together, and he will be left a widower."

"Why, mamma, who is forecasting now?" demanded Grace, with a little laugh. "You are worse than the gypsy."

She rose as she spoke, gave a few touches to her flowers, and moved toward the door.

"We will go down now," she said. "You need not be anxious about me. I am quite composed, I assure you."

CHAPTER XVIII.

GRACE'S OPPORTUNITY.

“Her presence was low music; when she went
She left behind a dreary discontent,
As sad as silence when a song is spent.”

—ALFRED AUSTIN.

WALTER ROCHE had made many heroic efforts to drive away the demon of gloom; but it had got possession of the smoking-room, and although he was enjoying the most admirably flavored of cigars, he was conscious of its dreary influence. With a sigh of relief, he escaped at last from the depressing atmosphere, and went off to dress for dinner.

But when he came down into the drawing-room, the demon went before him. There was no one there; the light of shaded lamps softly lit up the apartment, which was a great deal prettier in these days than it had ever been before; and couches and deep arm-chairs invited him to repose. Close to the blazing fire there was a table laden with greenhouse flowers and society journals, but neither flowers nor papers attracted him at that moment. He crossed the room, pulled aside the blind from one of the windows, and stood gazing out into the darkness of the night.

The room was overheated, he thought; the fire was too fierce; the perfumes were too overpowering. He pushed back the window-bolt and let in a breath of chill air, fresh and damp and sweet. The cry of the wild-fowl came from the rushes by the lake; far off a dog barked from the home farm; unseen wings

stirred in the wet ivy. His fancy shaped a woman's face out of the darkness, a pale face, delicate and spiritual, which seemed to be illuminated by an inward light.

"What do you think of Miss Taunton?" said a voice at his elbow.

It was a woman's voice, pleasant and refined. He turned sharply round, awakened out of a reverie, and found Grace Endon by his side.

As she stood there, smiling and well dressed, her hair showing golden tints in the glow of the fire and her cheeks still slightly flushed, he thought that he had never done her justice before. She was almost, if not quite, a pretty woman, and her presence brightened the gloomy old Court when its master and mistress were both out of humor.

Her question was a very natural one; but an answer did not come readily to his lips. The face that had shaped itself for him in the darkness had been Tracy's face, and he could scarcely say what he thought of her, even to himself.

Miss Endon noticed that he carefully closed the window before he replied:

"She is charming," he said indifferently as he dropped the blind.

Grace knew instinctively that Miss Taunton had taken his fancy. She had wanted to find out whether Tracy's attractions had influenced other men as well as Sir Alfred. And here was Walter Roche under the spell!

To be just to Miss Endon, it must be admitted that she was a fairly good-tempered woman, and had taken the numerous disappointments of a society life very well. The Endons were people of moderate means; but they were not rich, and Grace had secretly felt that she was not attractive enough to succeed without being handsomely gilded. It had been a blow to mother and daughter when the news of Sir Alfred's engagement had reached them. If he had

offered himself to Lady Catherine Dare, they would have borne it philosophically; but when they found that his betrothed was poor and unknown, they had felt that fate had been hard on them. If he had set his mind on marrying a poor girl, why could he not have chosen an old friend?

But there was no sign of mortification on Grace's face as she smiled up at Walter Roche. She walked quietly across to the fire, and stood, smiling still, with the warm light flickering over her figure.

"Yes, she is charming," she said, with an air of perfect frankness. "Every one must admit that she is a success. One's difficulty is to say what her especial charm is. To-day I thought it must be that soft, shadowy look about her eyes. They are large eyes; but she never opens them widely, and always gazes at you sweetly, and half-pensively, through the black lashes. Mamma and I are quite fascinated. But—do you think Sir Alfred seems as happy as one would expect him to be?"

Roche paused. Then he said, cautiously, that he thought Montjoy had a touch of chronic melancholy in his composition. You could read it in his face.

"There is something dreamy about Miss Taunton, isn't there?" continued Grace. "That is why she does not get on with Lady Montjoy, who is extremely matter-of-fact, you know. I didn't think that Sir Alfred was the man to be charmed by a dreamy girl. He has so little romance in him."

"What is romance?" Mr. Roche asked vaguely.

"Oh, you know what I mean," she said, laughing. "You have a good deal of it yourself. I think it is best described in Shelley's words—

"The desire of the moth for the star;
Of the night for the morrow;
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.'"

She recited the lines very prettily, and with an

expression of which he had not thought her capable. While she was speaking Alfred entered the room and paused to listen.

"That was very well done," he said. "I did not know that you went in for poetry, Miss Endon."

Then he looked at her rather more attentively than usual, and was struck by certain changes which he observed in her appearance. Her gown was pretty; her bright brown hair was dressed in a becoming fashion; her pose was natural and graceful.

"Oh!" she said, lightly, "there was a little gap in the conversation which nothing but a bit of poetry would fill."

Lady Montjoy and Mrs. Endon came in together. The former had recovered her composure, and Grace felt sure that she had risen in the estimation of her hostess.

When Lady Montjoy spoke to Miss Endon her voice softened a little; her glance was kind. The atmosphere was genial; even Alfred said to himself that it was pleasant to have the Endons in the house; they got on with his mother so well. And Grace had a way of making herself agreeable, keeping her own temper when other people had lost theirs. Altogether, he felt that she was decidedly a useful person.

When he came into the drawing-room after dinner, flushed, and not perfectly steady in his gait, there was Grace, ready to talk to him gayly. Lady Montjoy gave him an uneasy look: the habit of taking more wine than was good for him was growing fast. His mother had known very little about men who drank too much; all her life had been spent with an invalid, who lived according to strict rules, and it was not until they were settled at Woodcourt that she began to study the ways of her son.

Mrs. Endon studied him, too, and remembered a certain tale which had come to her ears in days long past. She had been told that Sir Alfred's grandfather had done wild things when the brandy fiend

had got possession of his brain—things that had been carefully hushed up, so that society might not be gratified by having something very shocking to talk about.

And Alfred was like his grandfather, old Sir Everard, whose portrait hung over the carved chimney-piece in the great dining-room. He had the same melancholy hazel eyes, the same handsome mouth, drooping at the corners; it was one of those faces which seem to belong to old picture-galleries and ancient halls. Unromantic as Mrs. Endon was, she could still understand that it was a face which would charm women, and bring sorrow into their lives. In all times, women have been found to sympathize with the men who have least deserved their tenderness. They have been known to slight the true hero who carefully concealed all traces of his noble conflict, and devote themselves, body and soul, to the selfish reveller, weary and worn with his own excess. On the whole, Mrs. Endon felt that it was, perhaps, a kind fate which had denied Alfred Montjoy to her daughter.

But Grace did not seem to be in the least conscious of Sir Alfred's condition. She played to him with charming cheerfulness, sang a song which he had huskily asked for, and then carried on a conversation in which his part was incoherently sustained. Lady Montjoy beheld her efforts to amuse him with deep satisfaction.

"Alfred has been completely upset to-day," she said confidentially to her old friend. "He is not quite himself to-night, and it is sweet in Grace to try to cheer him. Tracy does not know how to manage him in the least. I am so glad that she went home early."

Walter Roche, standing near his hostess, heard Tracy's name mentioned, and had his ears quickened by the sound.

He, too, was glad that she had gone home early.

What to him were all her subtle charms and graces, her gentle influence, her deep eyes! It was true that she was the last woman in the world on whom he would have fixed as likely to be Montjoy's choice. But Montjoy *had* chosen her.

He looked across the room to Sir Alfred, still deeply flushed and smiling vacantly; and then his gaze rested on Grace, who had so gayly undertaken the laborious task of entertaining a tipsy man. At that moment he hated them both right sinfully. Had they anything in common with that pale, spiritual face which had risen up before him in the darkness? He longed to be once more in the quiet of his own room, that he might call up that vision again.

But it is rather a perilous thing when a bachelor of thirty takes to calling up visions of a face which can never be more than a vision to him. Roche was conscious that he was not in an enviable mood to-night.

It had been one of those strange days which seem to be immensely long and to be crowded with new experiences. We have all known such days, and can trace the deep furrows that they have ploughed upon our lives. Roche was not quite sure, on looking back, of the very hour at which that day had begun. He could recall nothing earlier than the advent of a slender little figure, dressed in soft gray.

There are people who seem to photograph themselves upon our memories, and not themselves only, but all those surroundings which made a background for them when we saw them first. Tracy's background was a mass of softly colored autumn foliage and a piece of misty blue sky framed in the old doorway of the hall. This was how he first saw her—framed over and above by the square of the dark doorway, beyond which were rich olive-green leaves and yellow asters, bathed in the faint light of a November sun. She came in,

her head erect, moving with that peculiar grace and dignity which make a few women queens in the world. And Roche stood and looked his fill. Her movement was so quiet, and there was something so tender and pure in her pale face, that his heart was softened and calmed.

Here and there we come across certain men and women who possess the gift of silent emotion. The eyes that meet yours seem to convey a deep sympathy with your hidden life; the voice that speaks to you, in every-day words, penetrates into the very depths of your heart. Walter Roche felt the influence of this gift when he first met Tracy Taunton, and it was a spell which lingered with him long after the power of other enchantments had passed away.

Mrs. Endon thought him unusually dull and stupid, and was out of temper with her daughter. Grace was really carrying her flirtation too far, she felt. Sir Alfred would be sure to wake up with a headache to-morrow, and then he would fly to Tracy for consolation. She sat in the shaded lamplight, industriously setting woollen stitches in a large square of canvas, and worrying herself about Grace's follies as only mothers can.

Lady Montjoy, toying with an ivory crochet-needle, was going over the gypsy's predictions in her mind, and trying to recall every instance that she had ever heard of prophecy fulfilled. Alfred would have said that she was fast weakening her brain over this fortune-telling; but she could not give it up.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. ENDON'S ANXIETIES.

“But meet him now, and be it in the morn,
When every one will give the time of day,
He knits his brow, and shows an angry eye.”

—KING HENRY VI.

Two days went by without bringing any change for the better to Alfred's temper. The weather was soft and fair. Grace Endon was invariably in a sunny humor, but her host refused to hear the voice of the charmer. Perhaps she did not always charm wisely. Anyway, a close observer might have thought that she returned with irritating pertinacity to the fortune-telling subject.

“If I had been in Miss Taunton's circumstances,” she said once, with a musing air, “that gypsy's words would have made me utterly miserable.”

“Why?” asked Montjoy, turning his head quickly and looking down into her face.

They were standing out upon the terrace after breakfast. The morning air was calm and sweet, and every bush and spray was heavily weighted with dew-drops. Summer was gone, and in her stead had come a dreamy, languid season which might, at any hour, give place to sharp frosts and cutting blasts. The very uncertainty of this balmy quietness made it sweet. Even Grace, who was no very ardent lover of nature, felt its charm.

She slowly broke off a *Gloire de Dijon* rose which was blooming on a tree close to the library window. Its dark-green leaves were glossy and wet, and she

gently shook off the moisture before she fastened it into her bodice. Her companion watched her impatiently, but she did not speak until she had settled the flower to her liking. "Why?" she repeated softly. "Can you ask? If she is looking forward to a certain happy event, must not the gypsy have frightened her? We have all been talking about the wedding that is coming off. Yet the woman said that she could see no marriage at all."

"Tracy is too sensible to be moved by such nonsense," Alfred answered, in an uneasy tone.

"Is she? Then she must be one of the coldest girls in the world. Women are never quite sensible if they are really in love. I am sure I could not be," said Grace, with one of those little bursts of frankness which had been known to produce a good effect.

Now, Montjoy had always regarded her as one of the most sensible women of his acquaintance. She was not a gusher; she had never been seen to weep; her mirth had never been excessive. If ever there was a girl who "kept the even tenor of her way," it was Miss Endon; and these words of hers, coming from such prudent lips, impressed him deeply.

"And you thought that she would have been disturbed by that old wretch's tale?" he said, half angrily.

"Yes," Grace replied simply. "When a girl is in love she always gives heed to trifles. A breath can ruffle her peace. Men are different, I dare say; but we are all alike, I believe, when we fall under that spell."

She looked up, saw his darkening face, and felt that she had said enough. They both heard the old clock in the hall strike eleven as they stood there looking at each other. Without another word she turned, leaving him standing on the terrace in the dim sunshine, and went her way into the house.

About half an hour later she stood at the window

of her own room, looking out upon the grounds. Lawns and gardens were bathed in the soft light; the silver gleam of the lake was seen through a break in the trees. Grace's glance took in all the details of the scene, and, with an involuntary sigh, she thought how delightful life would be here if she were mistress of the place. This was a thought which had darted into her mind very often of late, and she did not hesitate to give it free entrance.

The handle of the door was turned quietly and Mrs. Endon came in. Grace looked round, not unprepared to see her mother and quite ready for a lecture.

"My dear, I want to speak to you," began Mrs. Endon, shutting the door carefully. "I saw you on the terrace after breakfast, and I felt I must say a word or two."

"Yes, mamma. Do you mind coming here by the window? It is so pleasant this morning," said Grace, in a tranquil voice.

Mrs. Endon crossed the room and sat down in an arm-chair, close to her daughter's side. Grace did not change her position. She stood still, gazing intently out upon the grounds.

"I think you are flirting too much with Alfred," said Mrs. Endon, plunging into the subject without any circumlocution. "Other people will make remarks if you go on, and that will be disagreeable for us all. We don't like that Taunton girl, of course; but our friendship with the Montjoys is of long standing, and we mean to keep it up after Alfred has married her."

"Certainly, if he does marry her," Grace remarked.

"There is hardly an 'if' in the case." Mrs. Endon was a little irritated. "Don't be misled by anything that Clara Montjoy may say. She is too furious to see things as they really are. He will never give the girl up."

Grace was silent. She drummed softly on the

glass with the tips of her white fingers, and looked fixedly at the golden gravel of the carriage-sweep. The peacocks were strutting about in the sunshine, catching the light upon their gorgeous plumage; and presently a couple of white doves came fluttering softly down like a pair of great snow-flakes. Somewhere, beyond the park, a church-bell droned out its knell through the sunlit mists; but no other sound broke the intense stillness of the day.

"Perhaps Tracy Taunton isn't greatly to be envied after all," Mrs. Endon continued. "Any one could see how it was with Alfred last night. He has inherited the vice of his grandfather—that wicked old Sir Everard. Thank heaven that he is no son of mine!"

"You mean that he was drunk?" Grace said abruptly.

"Of course I do. You know it, Grace."

The widow moved her hands restlessly in her lap and gave her daughter an anxious look. For the first time in her life she was beginning to feel that she did not quite understand her own child. What game was this that Grace was playing? It was sure to be a losing game, she thought.

"You know it," she repeated, "and Walter Roche knew it, too. I saw him watching you both. He is a sly man, always on the watch for something."

"Let him watch," said Grace doggedly. "As to the drunkenness, mamma, that is no uncommon thing. Nine men out of ten of our acquaintance drink too much. Why should you be hard on Alfred for such an every-day weakness?"

"Our circle is not composed entirely of inebriates," responded Mrs. Endon, with cold dignity. "I am surprised to hear you make such a rash statement."

"We number a great many inebriates among our bosom friends," said Grace, with quiet malice. "Every one does. Ladies get up temperance meet-

ings in their drawing-rooms and ask bishops to preside over them. The bishops go home and groan over their sons' wine bills; and the ladies have each a beloved drunkard for whom they can always make excuse. In spite of social reform, the time-honored race of wine-bibbers goes on as merrily as ever."

Mrs. Endon was quite startled. Her daughter spoke with an intensity of bitterness that was new.

"Men are not all alike when they are drunk, Grace," she remarked, after a pause. "Some are simply ridiculous; some are atrociously wicked. Sir Everard Montjoy belonged to the latter class. One day he nearly killed a groom in his madness. The matter was hushed up, and the man, who was crippled for life, received a handsome pension. Alfred has inherited his grandfather's temper as well as his face. I hope——"

She stopped short. Grace's fingers had ceased to drum upon the pane, and convulsively clasped the window-frame. Her face became suddenly white and drawn; her eyes were dilated.

"What is it that you see?" asked her mother, springing up from her seat.

A glance out of doors was answer enough. Sir Alfred was coming down the terrace steps, and out into the carriage-sweep, staggering as he walked. No one tried to stop him; no one seemed to observe him. At his approach the white doves fluttered up into the air again, and the peacocks made haste to escape from his path. He lifted up his flushed face in the calm sunlight and cursed the birds.

Grace drew her breath quickly and unclosed the casement with a quiet hand. Then she leaned out into the soft air and watched him.

"I wonder where he will go?" she murmured to herself. "If Tracy were to see him now she would hate him."

"He is a dreadful young man," said Mrs. Endon. "O Grace, how glad I am that he isn't engaged to you!"

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE WOODS.

“She stood up in bitter case, with a pale yet steady face,
*(Toll slowly,) Like a statue thunderstruck, which, though quivering,
seems to look
Right against the thunder-place.”*

—MRS. BROWNING.

GRANDMA had not been quite satisfied with Tracy's demeanor of late. She had questioned her about the visit to Woodcourt without getting much information; Tracy was preoccupied, she thought, and did not make an effort to be entertaining. Was there anything on her mind? The old lady was determined to know.

“How did you like the Endons?” she asked.
“Were they very civil?”

“I liked them pretty well,” Tracy replied. “And they were very civil.”

Grandma surveyed her thoughtfully for a moment, and then came out with a new question.

“Is Miss Endon pretty?” she demanded.
“No; but she is not plain,” said Tracy honestly.
“Her figure is good and she dresses with taste. On the whole, I think she would be called an attractive woman.”

Mrs. Taunton mused again, and studied her grandchild as she sat at breakfast. But Tracy being well used to grandma's searching gaze was perfectly composed. She sipped her coffee, and then readjusted a crimson leaf in a cluster which adorned the table. The leaves were in a crystal vase which was always filled with flowers or foliage.

"And what of the gypsies?" Mrs. Taunton asked, suddenly. "I have mentioned them several times, but you seem to have nothing to tell about them."

"No, I have nothing to tell about them." Tracy uttered her sentence in an expressionless tone, like a dull child accomplishing an answer in a lesson.

Grandma gave her another long look, and came to the conclusion that her face was graver and paler than usual. Could it be possible that Sir Alfred was wavering, just a little, in his allegiance? The desire of the match had taken such a deep root in the old lady's heart, and had grown and spread and flourished to such an extent, that it overshadowed every other feeling. In her mind, everything was colored by the dominant idea. She was afraid where no fear was. She was ever looking out for the day when her great hope might be torn up and laid low.

What if that Grace Endon had been a former flame? Grandma had a great dread of old loves. She fancied that there might be a dangerous heat remaining in the ashes of a by-gone passion. It was true that she had never heard a rumor of any past love-making between Sir Alfred and Miss Endon; but her imagination had got hold of the notion and embellished it in an alarming fashion. Besides, had not Tracy readily admitted that Grace was an attractive woman?

But if Tracy had cause for jealousy, it certainly did not appear in her manner. Grandma thought that she had accepted her good fortune with too much indifference, and hers was the calm of security. As a matter of fact she was far too calm. It might be well to rouse a spirit of alertness.

"Does Alfred admire Miss Endon?" she inquired in a tone of feigned indifference.

"Really, grandma, I don't know," Tracy said in a bored voice. "He seemed to get on with her very well. Lady Montjoy is fond of the Endons."

"Tracy, you do not try hard enough to make Lady

Montjoy fond of you," remarked grandma seriously. "A girl ought to win the heart of her husband's mother; it is most important."

"But some hearts are not to be won."

"The rector has always said that you could win any heart if you chose," said grandma. "But, Tracy, you are indifferent. One must make allowances for Lady Montjoy; her son's engagement was a great surprise, and one could hardly expect her to open her arms to you. She is gracious, however, and you ought to be grateful."

The girl was silent; but her face did not express gratitude. Her dark eyebrows were knitted with her quick impatience of old days.

"I dare say Miss Endon is a little envious," grandma continued, smiling to herself with half-concealed gratification. "It is quite natural, poor thing! What would she not give to be in your place? It must have been difficult for her to meet you pleasantly; I feel for her—I really do. All the county families are full of curiosity about you. The other day, when we met the Heathcotes in Jones' shop—why, Tracy, where are you going?"

"Out of doors, grandma." She had risen suddenly from her seat and was pushing the black rings of her hair away from her forehead. "It is such a warm morning I can't stay here any longer."

"How restless you are, my dear! You will not be thoroughly settled now till you are married."

Tracy went flying upstairs, sweeping past Barbara on her way. The narrow window on the landing was open, affording her a glimpse of faint blue sky, set in an ivy frame. Out of the house there was freedom and leisure for thought, and there were quiet places where one could commune with one's own heart and be still. Indoors there was grandma with her eternal talk of bridal arrangements and her endless congratulations on the winning of the great prize.

She put on her walking-garb with all speed, seizing on the first thing that came to her hand. The little gray cap was set hastily on her curly head, and then she flew to the wardrobe and took out a certain cloak which Mrs. Taunton had pronounced too matronly for her years. It was a gray cloak, of a darker shade than the cap, lined with quilted satin of the same tint. When thus attired, with the cloak falling in straight folds to the hem of her gown, there was a Puritan air about Tracy which gave her altogether a new aspect; and yet the prim garment hung on her lithe figure with perfect grace. Only, instead of the dainty little woman of the world who generally emerged from the old house door, there went forth a grave maiden, austere and pale, looking as those look who mind not earthly things.

She walked fast, taking those well-known short cuts which led out of the town. There had been a vague desire in her mind when she had fled from the house, and it strengthened and took a definite shape as she went on. She would go to the woods and find out the gypsy camp; it might be possible that Esther Lee had come back to sojourn there for a time. She did not ask herself what it was that she wanted to hear from the woman; she was only conscious of a longing to see her again—to see her when no other eyes were looking on and no other ears were listening to her voice.

There was a by-path, crossing a field behind a solitary farm-house, which led directly into a little-frequented part of the woods. It was seldom that Tracy followed this path; it was not a public way, and the farmer whose land it traversed was severe on trespassers of high or low degree. But to-day the girl was in no mood to care about Farmer Dale and his rights and wrongs, and she sped across the lonely field like an arrow, climbed lightly over the fence, and plunged at once into a narrow aisle, walled in by thick-growing trees.

The currents of air did not penetrate these dense shades, and it was almost as warm as summer here. The atmosphere was so still and so fragrant with woody scents that Tracy loved to steep herself in it, and felt the soothing influence of silence stealing over her spirit. Oak and beech were old familiar friends, stripped of their glories now, but ready to live their winter life with a stout heart. Green things were always growing in the underwood; mosses cushioned many a rugged bole and delicate gray lichen clung to many a leafless bough; the trees were now left desolate. As to the ivy, it flourished everywhere, flinging verdant sprays across the carpet of dead leaves that covered the sylvan floor.

So thickly did the branches spread on each hand that, though the intersecting paths often ran almost side by side, persons following them had no suspicion of each other's presence unless their voices were heard. Tracy had gone on and on, enjoying the stillness for some time, before she heard a voice. And then the sound of angry mutterings struck suddenly upon her ears, and she quickened her footsteps unawares.

There was a whimpering and a wailing, a savage oath—a child's shrill cry of pain. If Tracy's heart was throbbing fast at this moment it was not with fear: she was far too wrathful to feel afraid. No true woman has ever yet heard the wail of childish agony without developing a passionate courage; and this girl, sensitive, heroic, and full of strong maternal instinct, went springing forward to the rescue.

The path widened a little, opening out abruptly into a small clearing which was the beginning of a thinner growth of timber. In this space there were two persons, one a young man, tall and strong; the other a little brown-faced lad of six or seven. The man held the boy with the left hand and beat him furiously with a stick which he grasped in his right. There was blood flowing from the child's

head, and his first shrill cries were dying away into feeble moans when Tracy came up to them.

With a cry wilder than the child's had been the girl sprang right at her lover and struck him sharply in the face with the light umbrella which she carried. The attack was so sudden and the sight of Tracy so strange and unexpected that Alfred Montjoy dropped his stick and staggered backward in helpless bewilderment. As if fascinated, he could see nothing else in heaven or on earth but this slender gray shape with the white face and shining eyes.

"You are a coward, a cruel, dastardly coward!" The voice was still intensely musical, although it trembled with righteous wrath. "Ah, I see!" And the tones had a ring of bitter contempt in them. "You have been drinking."

"Yes, I have been drinking," said Montjoy stupidly. He was dazed, and his face tingled with the pain of the stroke; but the shock had almost sobered him.

"I'm sorry I hit the little beggar," he went on. "But they always howl for nothing, those little beggars do. He isn't hurt, you know."

Tracy had drawn the boy gently toward her and was wiping away the blood from his forehead. Astonishment had checked his cries, and he clung to her dress, soothed and comforted, but still quivering from head to foot. When Alfred drew a step nearer he clung closer yet, and tried to hide himself in the folds of the gray cloak.

"Go away," said Tracy, turning to the young man with the air of a queen. "Go away at once. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," he answered sullenly. "But I don't choose to go and leave you here in a rage. I've said I'm sorry, and you ought to be pleasant, Tracy, and forget all about this trumpery affair. I'll give the brat a shilling and send him back to

the cursed gypsies he belongs to. He'll be none the worse for a good licking."

"I will take him to his people," Tracy said. "I think he can hardly walk alone after your cruel usage. Go your way and I will go mine."

"You ought not to be mixed up with a set of thieves," he began, endeavoring to put on airs of authority. "I'm accountable to Mrs. Taunton for your safety. No one has a greater right to take care of you than I have. You will have to obey me one day, and you may as well begin at once."

She drew herself up and looked him full in the face—a look of such lofty contempt that it haunted him for many a year afterward.

"I shall never obey you," she answered. Her voice was clear and almost solemn in its calmness. "You are not fit to take care of yourself, and I will not have you walking by my side. Go home and get sober and see yourself in a true light."

She took the boy's hand, and they walked away together along a straight path which led out of the clearing.

He did not attempt to follow her. Confused as his brain still was, he had sense enough to know that she was too strong for him. He had done no harm; she was making a ridiculous fuss about nothing; it was all part and parcel of her romantic temperament. Later on, when this storm had blown over, her grandmother would come to his help and bring her to reason. It was the first time that she had ever seen him drunk, but what of that? She would have to get used to his ways and make the best of them.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BOND THAT CHAFED.

“Love’s throne was not with these; but far above
All passionate wind of welcome and farewell
He sat in breathless bowers they dream not of.”

—D. G. ROSSETTI.

THE gypsies, grouped in picturesque attitudes about their fire, looked as if they had been sitting and standing there ever since Tracy’s last visit to the encampment. The men were still lounging on the ground, smoking their short pipes; the women nursed the babies; the little ones played; and the handsome girl was still feeding the cheery flames. Miss Taunton, with an arm thrown round the boy’s shoulders, came suddenly into the midst of the group.

“The child is hurt,” she said simply. “A man has been beating him, and I have brought him back to you.” There was a general movement. The little fellow freed himself from Tracy’s light clasp and went forward, saying some words in a strange tongue. One of the women uttered a passionate exclamation and began to examine his wound. And then a tall figure emerged from a tent and stood upright among them all. Tracy recognized the penetrating dark eyes when she encountered their gaze, and was conscious of a sudden thrill, half of hope, half of fear. It was Esther Lee.

Both the men had risen, looking furtively and darkly at Miss Taunton; but not speaking. The tall woman said a few words in Romany, and then addressed Tracy in a calm voice.

"You are kind to the poor gypsies, lady—we thank you, all of us."

"I am very sorry for the poor child. I wish I could have kept him from harm," said Tracy, holding out some silver rather timidly. The boy's mother accepted the gift with a slight show of gratitude.

"We thank you," Esther Lee repeated gravely. "Go home now, lady; there's no more to be said. The hand that shed the child's blood might have shed your own. But that will not be."

"If you only would speak quite plainly——"

Tracy began the sentence impulsively, scarcely knowing what she said, much wrought upon by all that she had just passed through. But Esther Lee lifted her hand with a warning gesture.

"I have spoken," said the calm voice. "Go home, lady. My words were true, and you will know the truth."

The command was obeyed in silence. Tracy went home swiftly through the woods and across Farmer Dale's land without let or hindrance. She had a dim recollection afterward of speeding through the High Street like some one in a dream; but no one seemed to notice anything unusual in her aspect, and the old town at this time of day was often very still.

Barbara started, and looked at her wonderingly when the hall door was opened. There were voices in the breakfast-room; she could hear the rector's familiar tones, and then Mrs. Taunton called out cheerfully, "Is that you, Tracy?"

Poor grandma! What a change would come over her when she knew all that had happened that morning! As that well-known call met her ears, Tracy suddenly realized the disappointment which would embitter the old lady's peaceful life. But at all costs the girl felt that she must be free. Never again would she suffer herself to submit to the yoke of bondage.

"Is that you, Tracy?" repeated grandma.

"Yes," Tracy answered mechanically.

"Come in here at once. Mr. Lazelle wants to speak to you."

She came in slowly and quietly and the rector rose to meet her with his kind smile.

"We have made our plans for the bazaar," he began at once. "And we have settled that you are to preside over a stall with——why, surely you are not well, my child!"

"I have had a shock, that is all."

She uttered the words in a passionless voice, and sank down into the chair which he placed for her. Mrs. Taunton got up hastily, calling to Barbara to bring wine. But Tracy stopped her with a sudden gesture. "Not wine, grandma; I will not touch it. Tell Barbara not to stand there staring. I shall be quite strong again presently."

The old lady dismissed Barbara with a glance. Her hands were trembling as she unfastened her grandchild's cloak. It fidgeted Tracy to feel those unsteady fingers at her collar, but she controlled the impulse to push them away; grandma would have enough to suffer without enduring a rebuff, she thought. The rector stood by and looked on gravely.

"Has anything happened to Alfred?" Mrs. Taunton asked at last, unable any longer to bear the suspense.

"Not exactly; there has been no accident," said Tracy, with hesitation.

Grandma trembled more than ever, convinced that her worst fears were about to be realized. Mr. Lazelle gently suggested that she should sit down.

"Tell her everything as soon as possible," he whispered to Tracy.

"I have had a shock," Tracy repeated. "In the woods this morning I came upon Alfred beating a gypsy boy. The child's head was bleeding; you

may see his blood upon my dress," she added, pointing to a spot on her skirt.

The rector was a strong man, yet he shuddered visibly. Mrs. Taunton was pale, but she made an attempt to put the truth from her.

"Surely you are exaggerating," she said. "What had the boy done?"

"Nothing, grandma. Alfred had been drinking, and the drink had made him furious."

Mrs. Taunton drew a deep breath. Then she demanded quickly:

"What came next? What did you do?"

"I was in a passion," Tracy said. "When I saw the child writhing in his grasp I nearly went mad. I struck Alfred in the face with my sunshade, and he was so startled that he let the boy go."

"Struck him? Oh, how dreadful!" moaned the old lady, throwing up her hands. "I hope you did not hurt him!"

"I hope she did," the rector murmured.

"I hurt him a little, a very little," Tracy replied; "and then I ordered him out of my sight and took the boy back to his own people. There is nothing more to tell, only that all is over between Alfred and me."

"Did he say that all was over?" Mrs. Taunton almost shrieked.

"No, grandma; I say it. I will not marry a man who brutalizes himself as Alfred has done."

Mrs. Taunton looked at her with a mixture of anger and pity.

"Tracy, your strong imagination colors everything," she said. "You do not see things as they really are. Of course it is right to love children, but you are absurdly sentimental where they are concerned. I am sure that the little gypsy was more frightened than hurt. You cannot expect a young man like Alfred to be as tender to beggar children as you are."

There was a hopeless look in Tracy's eyes at that moment. The rector saw the expression and felt that she was weary with the thought of a coming conflict. It would be a hard battle to fight, as he knew right well, but the girl would win the victory; and the prize of victory was freedom.

Mr. Lazelle had never liked Alfred Montjoy from the first; certain vague rumors had been whispered which the rector did not wish to believe, yet found it impossible altogether to disregard. He had looked on, longing to hold Tracy back from the pitfall that was hidden under roses; but grandma's influence had prevailed. Now the time had come for him to stand firmly by the girl's side and help her to fight the good fight. He glanced at grandma with a look of sharp displeasure such as was seldom seen on his benign face. Being a wise man, however, and a man of the world, he said nothing just then.

"I dare say your nerves are shaken, my dear," the old lady continued. "Of course when you struck Alfred you did not know what you were doing in the least."

"Yes, grandma; I did know," Tracy said quietly. "I felt that if I did not strike him he would kill the child. If it all happened again I should do just the same."

"But it will not happen again!" cried grandma, in a state of exasperation. "Such an event can only occur once in a lifetime."

"I am afraid it may occur many times," Tracy answered sadly. "One cannot depend on a man who gets drunk."

"But he isn't always getting drunk. O Tracy, how can you be so hard and unforgiving?"

"I can never forget the rage in his face," the girl said, speaking half to herself. "It was fiendish. It seemed as if there had always been a devil pent up within him, and the drink had set it free."

"How dare you use such awful language?" grandma

asked angrily. "I wonder that Mr. Lazelle does not reprove you."

Tracy remained silent. Her eyes were gazing out into the garden, as if she had called up a vision of some horrid thing. When Mrs. Taunton went on speaking wrathfully, she shivered and turned to the rector with a look of dumb distress.

He rose and took one of her cold hands in his.

"This dear child is suffering intensely," he said earnestly. "She must go to her room and lie down in peace."

She still looked at him in silence, while the tears gathered and welled slowly over her white cheeks.

"Yes, yes, she had better lie down," assented grandma, alarmed by her paleness. "You will come in again this afternoon, Mr. Lazelle?"

He inclined his head gravely, and something in his manner made the old lady half-afraid of him. Then he opened the door, and Tracy went languidly out of the room.

She shut herself into her studio with a sense of relief, although every limb was aching wearily. She had been often tired before, but now there was a deadly depression added to bodily fatigue, and she sank down upon a couch, half-closing her eyes, and wondering vaguely if this was the beginning of an illness. Mrs. Taunton's angry words pressed heavily upon her heart. She was burdened with the fear of the coming struggle, knowing, only too well, how reluctantly Alfred would relinquish his prize, and how desperately grandma would fight on his side.

But she *must* be free. And then a vision of her life as it would be if she married Alfred Montjoy seemed to pass swiftly before her eyes. She realized in this moment all the misery of bodily union and spiritual disunion—realized it so strongly that she sprang up suddenly with an irrepressible cry of anguish.

Oh, to go back again to her twenty-first birthday, and start afresh on the perilous path of womanhood!

Oh, to be once more the unfettered girl who had gone gayly to the silent lake to steal water-lilies! She began to pace up and down the room, clasping her hands tightly over her breast; and thinking, thinking, thinking till her temples throbbed, and the desire for rest and freedom burned like a fire in her heart.

There are times in all our lives when we feel that help must come from within us, and not from anything outside ourselves. At this crisis of her life, Tracy was feeling a feverish craving for aid, and an intense consciousness of terror; terror, not of Alfred, but of those clinging fibres of tenderness which had grown with her growth, and wound themselves round her grandmother. How could she tear herself away, and close her ears to the old lady's pleadings? Yet the wrench must come, and soon. Amid all the wild tumult of emotions she could hear an inner voice clearly saying to her, "Soon, soon."

Tired at last of restless movement, she sat down wearily in her old seat near the window, and lifted her eyes to the picture of her knight. She saw again those sunlit heights of dreamland on which she had met him long ago. The old splendor was still lingering on the summits of those everlasting hills; the old peace still hovered like a dove over that trysting-place. As she looked long and earnestly at the tranquil face of her hero, she felt a warm flood of tears rising to her eyes, and something of his calmness seemed to steal into her heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

BREAKING FREE.

“They were parted then at last?
Was it duty, or force, or fate?
Or only a wordy blast
Blew to the meeting-gate?”

—GEORGE MACDONALD.

It was late in the afternoon when Tracy came slowly downstairs and entered the drawing-room. She was not yet mistress of herself, and she still trembled at the very thought of the coming struggle. She knew that she was unspeakably afraid of the little old lady that sat erect in her chair, and sipped her tea. That spirit of self-sacrifice, which always dwelt deep in her heart, would yet tempt her to ruin her own happiness that grandma might rejoice. It seemed to her at this moment that she must strike Mrs. Taunton’s death-blow wth her own hand.

Coming out of darkness into the lighted room, warm, and perfumed with flowers, a sudden dizziness overpowered her. She faltered and stopped, leaning against the door for an instant.

“You are still weak,” said Mr. Lazelle. He would have supported her, but she recovered herself, and with one of those impulses which sometimes came to her, she said:

“Yes, but I must be strong at any cost.”

“You must listen to the appeal of your own heart. Its voice is the only voice that has a right to be heard,” replied the rector quietly.

Mrs. Taunton gave him a swift glance, half-angry,

half-entreating. But he looked back at her calmly and almost sternly as he put Tracy into a chair.

"Have you been lying down, my dear?" asked the old lady, giving her some tea. "There is nothing as good as rest when one has had a shock. Don't imagine that you are going to be ill. Young people so often think that an illness is sure to follow great agitation."

"I don't think I am going to be ill," Tracy answered meekly.

"You will be as well as ever to-morrow," continued grandma; but the words did not sound as if she meant them. She was resolutely bent on making light of everything just then. In by-gone days she had succeeded—or had thought that she had succeeded—in talking Tracy out of many an absurd notion. But something warned her that the task which lay before her would be a difficult one, and that warning came from the recesses of her own conscience.

She had asked Mr. Lazelle to return, partly because she had hoped to win him over to her side, and partly because she was, herself, really unshaken. The presence of an old friend was comforting to her unsettled mind; but she had seen at once that all his forces were arrayed against her. No difference of opinion could ever estrange her from the rector; yet his steady opposition made her angry. She was all the more angry because she felt that he was right, and knew that he looked, with unflinching gaze, into that innermost self of hers which troubled her.

"You will be as well as ever to-morrow," she repeated. And then, as her eyes rested on the pale face at her side, she was conscious of a miserable heart-sickness.

What if Tracy should be ill, after all? What if these young feet, that she had coaxed and guided into her chosen path, should stop forever? It is a dangerous thing to direct another person's life. To wake up and find that one has been a blind leader

is bad enough; but the worst pang comes when we see what we have done to our followers. We might have borne our own ruin philosophically; but it is the sight of their miry robes and bleeding feet that drives us to despair. Perhaps they were not blind at all, but stumbled after their sightless guide with the noble foolishness of loyal hearts, foreseeing, all too clearly, the end of the journey.

"My dearest child, you are taking nothing," she said, with a tremor in her voice. "O Tracy, are you going to make us all wretched? When trouble comes, it shows me that I am an old woman!"

"Are you not making the trouble worse than it is?" Mr. Lazelle asked. "We can never see anything plainly until we have first looked full at the truth. It is not Tracy who is making us all wretched."

"You mean that I am the misery-maker," exclaimed grandma.

"Match-makers are often misery-makers," he answered calmly.

"You are a match-maker yourself, Mr. Lazelle! You are always marrying people."

"I do not make marriages, Mrs. Taunton. I ask for a blessing upon them."

"Do not let us talk about marriage." It was Tracy who spoke in a low, shaken voice. "I want to forget it altogether."

Grandma moaned audibly.

"Your mind needs rest," said the rector kindly, and he patted one of the little hands which lay listlessly in the girl's lap.

"There cannot be any rest till things are definitely understood," she cried. "If it could be settled without seeing Alfred——"

"Tracy, you are demented!" interrupted Mrs. Taunton, throwing up both hands. "Do you think that Alfred will accept his dismissal without an interview? Be just and give him a chance to plead his cause."

"Mr Lazelle, must I see him again?"

"She does not heed me," wailed the old lady.
"She has turned against her own grandmother!"

In an instant Tracy's arms were round her neck.
"My darling old granny," she murmured between her kisses, "you have no idea how fond I am of you. I have never loved you better than when I have been perfectly convinced that you were the most exasperating old lady in the world. I want to live with you always—always; don't you understand?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Taunton tearfully, "I have always loved you ten times better than Laura, but I wish you were more like her! If I could only make a rational, commonplace girl of you, we might all be happy yet."

"Perhaps we might," Tracy answered sadly.
"It is well to have high ideals for one's self, but it is quite natural that our relations should find them inconvenient. At this moment, grandma, I have a great desire to go out of the world."

"I have had that desire many times," remarked Mr. Lazelle; "but it has not been granted yet. Those who wish to go are made to stay. It is the impatient scholar who is kept longest in school."

The kind voice and wise words had a quieting influence. Tracy looked up at him with gratitude in her tired eyes.

"We are very foolish this evening," said grandma, trying hard to recover herself. "Next week we shall smile contemptuously at our own folly. Alfred will call to-morrow, I dare say; and then, Tracy, you must be reasonable, and listen to all that he says."

"I will listen to him, grandma; but nothing that he can say will shake my resolution. It has all been wrong from the beginning. I promised to love him, thinking that love would follow the promise."

"Instead of which," said Mr. Lazelle, "the promise should have followed the love."

"Now you are wandering off into your mystical nonsense!" Mrs. Taunton cried. "Anyhow, Tracy, you *did* promise, that is a fact that cannot be denied."

"I do not attempt to deny it, grandma."

"You must be reasonable, my dear child," the old lady repeated. "When you see Alfred again he will explain everything. This is your first quarrel, and you think it is to be an ending, but—"

"I wish you would understand me, grandma. There must be an ending. No one knows what it costs me to distress you."

"It would distress me exceedingly if a grandchild of mine were to break her promise. I hold that covenant-breaking is one of the blackest sins of humanity."

"I do not," said the rector stoutly. "And I think that Montjoy has given Tracy good reason for breaking her promise."

"How terribly hard you are on that poor fellow," Mrs. Taunton exclaimed angrily. "Do you consider the effect that this parting may have on him? He may be ruined—utterly ruined—if Tracy throws him off."

"When there is a cross that must be borne either by a man or a woman, the man ought to take it upon himself," said Mr. Lazelle. "If he refuses to take it he is a cur. Above all things this poor child desires her freedom. Is it right, is it noble, to keep her bound, because Montjoy does not want to let her go?"

"Everybody will say that she has been jilted," said Mrs. Taunton, suddenly shifting her ground. "All the spiteful people in the county will rejoice over her humiliation. I shall never, never dare to show my face!"

Tracy looked at her with a sad little smile. The rector made a movement of impatience.

"I shall be ready to rejoice with them, grandma," she said. "Sometimes congratulations are the sad-

dest words that one can hear, and condolence the sweetest. It is better that the knell should toll for me than the wedding-bells chime."

"We have nothing now to do with knells," put in Mr. Lazelle quickly. "This is no occasion for melancholy talk. As for the spiteful people, they make merry if they please; but I see no reason why my old friend should not dare to show her face. It is a very comely face still," he added pleasantly.

Grandma was very fond of compliments, and a faint smile hovered round her mouth for a moment. But it soon vanished. Tracy was the care of her heart, the apple of her eye, but this kind of love is always near akin to tyranny; there was, therefore, an involuntary flash from her eyes as she looked at the girl, sitting white and calm by her side.

"If there is really no hope of a reconciliation, we had better leave Ferngate," she said, after a pause. "You may be indifferent to public opinion, Tracy, but I cannot bear to see you the laughing-stock of the place. The Tauntons have always held up their heads in the world. I wish you had a little more proper pride."

The rector bent forward, resting his arm on the table, and looking into grandma's face with an intense expression that almost awed her.

"Mrs. Taunton," he said, "you must not try to force the child's heart. There is not the slightest hope of a reconciliation. The sooner you accept this truth, the better it will be for you. We all have to relinquish some splendid possibilities in our lives. For my part, I am thankful for Tracy's release. He was utterly unworthy of her. To-day she has had to choose between the blessing of freedom and the curse of bondage; and she has chosen the blessing."

Those last words sank deeply into the old lady's mind, and sealed her lips. She urged Tracy no more.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DISQUIET.

“If she loves at last,
Her love’s a readjustment of self-love,
No more.”

—MRS. BROWNING.

GRACE watched silently and eagerly for Alfred’s return from his morning walk. Mrs. Endon went downstairs much disquieted in mind, and carried her crewels and canvas into the library. Lady Montjoy often spent her mornings in that room, and the widows had fallen into the habit of chatting confidentially over their work there. But Mrs. Endon had no wish for a confidential chat this morning. She was worried and perplexed about her daughter, and wanted to think over her troubles in solitude. Yet, as she owed something to her hostess, who had been invariably kind, she stifled the desire to be alone and entered the library with her usual smile.

Lady Montjoy was there, but she was not smiling. She looked up anxiously as her friend came in.

“Julia,” she began, “did you see Alfred before he went out this morning?”

Mrs. Endon hesitated for an instant. Then she seated herself deliberately and opened her work-bag, not glancing at Lady Montjoy at all.

“I happened to catch a glimpse of him from Grace’s window,” she answered composedly.

“Where is Grace now? Did she go out with him?”

“Oh, no; she is in her own room, doing something to one of her dresses.”

"Ah," sighed Lady Montjoy, "I hoped she had gone with him."

Mrs. Endon was silent, and went on with her work in a manner suggestive of industrious intention.

"Julia," said her friend, after a pause, "you are a happy woman. You have a child who never gives you the slightest cause for uneasiness."

Mrs. Endon worked rather faster.

"Grace is a good girl," she responded quietly.

"A very good girl. Sometimes I wish that I had a daughter instead of a son. Now that we have settled in this stupid place, I have time to study Alfred's ways, and he makes me unhappy."

"You know, Clara, that you can't expect a young man to be perfect. He will do as others do," said Mrs. Endon, dexterously filling her needle.

"I wish he would do as Walter Roche does."

"Well, I do not care very much for Walter Roche myself," Mrs. Endon confessed. "He always seems to me to be watching people and finding out something to their disadvantage. I don't quite trust those men who are outwardly cautious and correct."

"Oh, I never supposed that Mr. Roche was a saint," said Lady Montjoy irritably. "But he is a pleasant man to have in the house, because he doesn't take more wine than is good for him."

Mrs. Endon had nothing to say. Her eyes were fixed on her canvas.

"You must have noticed Alfred's weakness, Julia: you are always observant. Can you wonder that I am anxious?"

Straightforwardness was the best policy here. Mrs. Endon stayed her hand for a moment.

"No, Clara, I don't wonder at your anxiety. Your son does drink a little more than he ought, and this lazy country life encourages the habit. Men often drink simply because they lack occupation."

"Nothing has gone well with him since he came to this detestable old place!" Lady Montjoy cried. "I

wish we had left it to the rats and the tramps. Not one happy hour have I ever known here. If he would break off his miserable engagement and come away from Woodcourt, there might be a chance of happiness yet!"

"But Woodcourt is a charming home," said Mrs. Endon, with a glance out of the window. The peacock had come back to the terrace and was spreading out his plumes in the sun; and the white pigeons had fluttered down again to perch upon the gray-stone urns. Beyond, through a break in the trees, could be seen a silvery glimpse of the lake; the long green aisles were shadowy and still. As Mrs. Endon's eyes wandered over this fair scene, she felt that it might be possible to forgive Alfred's sins for the sake of securing such a resting-place. And then she thought of her daughter upstairs, and remembered that Grace was actually possessed of a heart. An inconvenient possession, surely, and one which is sometimes given away where it is not asked for. She sighed when she thought of Grace.

"It has no charms for me," replied Lady Montjoy, with a melancholy shake of the head. "If Alfred marries that dreadful girl, I shall go as far away as I can. I wish—oh, I wish——"

She left the sentence unfinished and sank back in her chair. Footsteps were heard approaching the door, and presently Walter Roche walked into the room, with a peculiar expression on his face.

"Has Alfred come back yet?" Lady Montjoy asked. "It must be nearly time for lunch."

"Yes, he has come back," Roche responded. "I saw him near the stables a minute ago."

"Did he say that he had been to the Tauntons'?" she inquired.

"No; I don't think he went to the Laurels," replied Walter Roche in a hard, dry tone, which made Mrs. Endon look up. He met her inquisitive gaze and turned away.

"Something has happened," she thought.

"Then where *has* he been?" demanded Lady Montjoy, noticing that Roche was not at ease. "He went off soon after breakfast, did he not?"

"I don't know when he went off. I rode to Ferngate this morning to call on the Arundels. They are getting up a bazaar for the organ-fund, and they want to arrange some tableaux. I suppose you will do something to help them, Lady Montjoy?" added Roche, trying desperately to get back his usual manner.

"I suppose I must, but I hate bazaars," she answered.

"So do most people," said Walter cheerfully. "But this won't be as bad as they generally are. They are going to have a snow cavern, full of treasures, and Father Christmas presiding over them. There will be plenty of attractions."

He had got himself well in hand now, or thought that he had. Grace Endon came in, swiftly and silently, and her mother saw that there was a feverish brightness in her eyes. Nobody was quite natural and they were all trying to keep up appearances, and Mrs. Endon was sick of the whole business; wanted to go away somewhere and be quiet.

The gong sounded for luncheon and Alfred appeared at last. Every one looked at him excepting Walter Roche, who gazed steadfastly at a picture on the wall.

"My dear Alfred," said Lady Montjoy, rashly, "how tired and hot you look."

His face was flushed and inflamed, and there was an angry sparkle in the eyes that met hers.

"I've been into the woods," he answered, "and there wasn't a breath of air to be had. The trees want thinning; I never saw a place so shamefully neglected. It is enough to make a man hot when he sees things going to ruin."

"Oh, you will soon set everything right," said

Grace, smoothly. "And it is a good thing that you have something to spend your energy upon. For my own part, I have an immense fund of energy that is never called for at all."

When they were seated at luncheon, Alfred's temper very nearly broke through the slight bonds that usually restrained it in society. Lady Montjoy was not happy in her remarks that day. She was in one of those painful conditions of mind which always produce unlucky speeches. In this mood, any sentence that she uttered was certain to make mischief. The girl in the fairy tale who dropped toads and spiders from her mouth was scarcely more unfortunate.

"The air of Woodcourt does not agree with Alfred," she said, addressing the company generally. "It is too soft and relaxing. He has never been really well since he came here. I saw a great change in him when I arrived."

"I am perfectly well," declared her son, with half-suppressed fury. "Before your arrival there was a glorious time of pleasantness and peace. Things have been going wrong ever since you took the reins."

Mrs. Endon winced perceptibly. She had enough genuine liking for her old friend to be pained for her sake. Grace, with a heightened color, glanced swiftly from the son to the mother.

"Well," said Lady Montjoy, with resignation, "I am quite willing to give up the reins to somebody else. I dare say she will take my place very soon."

There was a little crash at the other end of the table. Alfred had broken a claret glass. He looked so hot, and angry, and confused, that Grace felt sure there had been a serious lovers' quarrel. Would it ever be made up? she wondered. And then, with a woman's instinct, she guessed the truth.

Something that she had wished to happen had really happened. Tracy had met Alfred that morn-

ing, and the result of that meeting could easily be imagined.

"I knew she would hate him if she saw him when he was drunk," thought Grace, concentrating her attention on her plate and tasting nothing that she ate. "It is well that her eyes should be thoroughly opened. What has a romantic dreamer like Tracy to do with a man of Alfred's stamp? I should like to know if she has snapped the chain. Mr. Roche might tell me if he could be made to speak. I believe he has heard all about it."

She was quite certain that "he had heard all about it" when she ventured to glance at him. Every vestige of expression had been carefully effaced from his countenance. No face could have been more perfectly innocent of any trace of human emotion.

"When a man looks as vacant as that, he always knows a great deal," was Grace's conclusion.

Lady Montjoy had arranged to go out driving with the Endons in the afternoon. The drive would be short if they were to return at dusk; and Grace was glad to escape to her room to get ready. She ran upstairs, and swept through the corridors of the old house with a swiftness that was more like Tracy than herself.

Her heart was throbbing wildly when she shut her door and sank into a chair. She was not accustomed to these strong pulsations; life had never been so exciting before. All her hopes and fears had been of the tamest kind.

"Mamma will be coming in a moment," she thought. "Mamma is a person who never can let one alone. She is so afraid that I shall betray myself that she worries me into doing it. My cheeks would not have got so hot at luncheon if she hadn't watched me. There are times in a woman's life when a mother is the last person who ought to interfere. She knows too much and yet understands nothing."

She rose suddenly, remembering that the carriage

would be at the door at a quarter to three. Her fingers trembled as she put on a close hat and covered her face with a thick-spotted net veil that hid the tell-tale flush. As she fastened her fur-lined cloak the handle of the door was turned. Mrs. Endon came softly in.

"O Grace!" she said.

"Well, mamma?"

"I am feeling very nervous and uncomfortable," began the poor lady, speaking in a low voice. "We are on the verge of a disturbance. This household will be soon broken up, I fancy."

"Households are always breaking up," responded Grace in a dry tone, as she opened her glove-box.

"Grace, you are pretending that you don't feel anything; but I can see through the pretence. You are restless and anxious."

"Did you come on purpose to tell me that, mamma?"

"Yes, I did," said Mrs. Endon candidly. "I think you are expecting something, and I am afraid of disappointment."

"You need not be afraid of anything," Grace replied. "I am not a child. Whatever comes, I can meet it."

"I hope you can," said her mother. "I *do* hope you can. There is the carriage."

They went downstairs, and found Montjoy and Roche lounging in the hall. Although the weather was mild, a log was burning in the great fireplace, and the collie lay stretched upon the gray wolf-skin before it. Grace scarcely glanced at the men; she went up to the dog and patted his head with a cheerful word. Then she followed her mother and seated herself in the carriage.

"There's no nonsense in that woman," said Alfred, in a moody tone. "She's always the same."

"Yes," responded Roche quietly, "always the same."

"If I had known what was good for me, I suppose I should have got engaged to a girl like that."

"Yes," responded Roche again.

"But then I shouldn't have had what I wanted," Alfred went on, a dark flush overspreading his face. "I've got the girl I fancied, and I don't mean to give her up."

He slightly tossed his head backward as he spoke and looked defiantly at Roche. There was a brief pause; the log crackled, the dog yawned. Walter paced to and fro, looking down on the red and black squares at his feet. He was pale and wore a set look; but his face was still so guarded that it expressed absolutely nothing.

"I don't mean to give her up," Alfred repeated. "I shall see her to-morrow. She will have had time to cool, and we shall begin afresh. But there's one thing that I'm resolved to do without any more delay and humbug."

"What is that?" Roche asked.

"I'm going to get married. My mother says she is willing to give up the reins; and upon my word she shall! We are all getting along badly here. I shall hurry on the wedding."

Roche walked up to the fire and stopped.

"There is Miss Taunton's consent to be gained," he said. "Will she allow herself to be hurried on? Are you quite sure that she does not mean to end the matter?"

"She will be talked over," returned Alfred confidently. "Her grandmother knows how to manage her. I shall let her see that I am not to be daunted by a girl's temper. She has said yes and she must stick to yes. By and by I shall have it all my own way, and she will find that she has a master."

Just for an instant a change flashed over Roche's inexpressive face. He flung a glance of intense wrath and scorn at his host. But Alfred did not see it, and it vanished as swiftly as it came.

"I shall go to the Laurels to-morrow," he said, "and get everything finally settled."

There was nothing more to say. Roche had his own reasons for not prolonging the talk, and murmured something about going to write letters.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“WE MUST PART.”

“Do I entice you? Do I speak you fair?

Or, rather, do I not in plainest truth

‘Tell you—I do not nor I cannot love you?’”

—MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM.

IT was raining when Tracy awoke the next morning, but she opened her eyes with the consciousness that she was looking out upon a happier world.

She was going to be free. The worst part of the struggle was over. There was nothing more to fear from grandma, who had retired from the conflict after that last passage-at-arms with the rector. She had made a silent vow that she would not urge her grandchild again; she would leave the affair in Tracy’s hands, telling the girl to do that which seemed best to herself.

Barbara, who had been told nothing, suspected everything. Miss Tracy was just her old self, that was all; the naughtiest, queerest being that ever was. But even Barbara (who professed to be hardened against all surprises) could hardly help starting when she saw the brightness of Tracy’s morning face.

The rain continued to fall, but what did that matter to a joyful heart? The very room seemed to have changed its aspect: it was once more the dear, familiar little room which had sheltered her childish slumbers. She admired the drapery of her window, which was white, spotted with rose-buds, and bordered with ball-fringe. She looked affectionately at every simple decoration which her own hands had made, the wall-pockets, and pictures so

arranged as to indicate an artist's eye and skilful fingers; the foreign trifles that gave a piquant brightness to the apartment. It was her own beloved old sanctum still; she was not called upon to leave it for a stately chamber hung with tapestry, furnished with carved oak, and haunted by the restless ghosts of departed Montjoys.

When she rose and dressed she was conscious that the events of yesterday had shaken her. But it was a happy face which confronted her in the glass, although there were dark shadows under the eyes and the cheeks were even paler than usual. A bunch of pansies stood on the toilet-table, and she chose two or three that were purple in hue and fastened them at the neck of her lavender serge gown. Thus arrayed, she looked something like one of Mr. Burne Jones' graceful maidens, just ready to have some mystic sentence emblazoned in antique letters at her feet.

Grandma was first at the breakfast-table, of course. Looking back on all the peaceful mornings of the past, Tracy could not recall one time when grandma had not been first. She sat in her usual place behind the urn, wearing an old cap with brown ribbons which Tracy had not expected to see again. A closer inspection proved that she had put on an ancient black silk apron, on which there were one or two little greasy spots that would not come out. She had also donned a white silk kerchief which had seen its best days, and had fastened it with a battered mourning brooch which, as a rule, was only worn when her other brooches had lost their pins. Her whole appearance expressed patient resignation to the decrees of Providence, and meek preparation for a change in circumstances.

But it was so nice to see her sitting there, and to feel that one would not be torn away from her! The comfort of her presence warmed Tracy's heart and made her rejoice anew.

"Oh, you dearest old woman," she said, with a rapturous embrace. "How shabby you are to-day! I thought that this kerchief was made into a duster long ago. And why will you disfigure yourself with that disreputable old apron?"

Grandma did not resent these remarks. She had wished that her shabbiness should be noticed. She was prepared to endure her disappointment dramatically.

"I have put my best things away," she said mildly. "It will be a long time before I can afford to get any more. There will be many new expenses, of course."

"What are the new expenses?" Tracy asked.

"Why, of course, we must travel; and travelling costs money. After—after the engagement is definitely broken off we must go away. It will be best to go before the matter is noised abroad."

"No, it won't," replied Tracy, kissing her again with double heartiness. "I decline to be dragged away to unknown regions in the beginning of winter, and you would be utterly miserable if you went. I want to enjoy my books, and my painting, and my home, and my granny! We shall have our old happy days back again."

"O Tracy, I am surprised at you," Mrs. Taunton sighed.

"It is good for you to have these surprises. Without them, your life would be as tame as an old song. While you grumble at me for saying and doing unexpected things, you enjoy them unconsciously. You are like the little fir tree in the Danish story-book, and don't realize your own happiness. Dear grandma, what a flood of eloquence I have expended upon you!"

"You have, indeed," said Mrs. Taunton, trying not to smile too much; "and the coffee is getting cold. Sit down and begin breakfast."

"You must promise to go upstairs presently and

take off that cap and apron." Tracy gave her a final hug as she spoke. "Yes, and that loathly duster that sits limply on your shou ders. No matter how you are dressed, you are always a lovely old person; but I would fain see your charms set off to the best advantage."

Grandma was secretly well pleased, although she pretended to despise this nonsense. She had made her little impression, and that was what she cared for. From her youth up she had always enjoyed making impressions: you were not a person of consequence, she opined, unless you *did* make them. She was a quiet woman, with a love of peace and stillness, yet when she had occasion to come out of her retirement, there was nothing that pleased her better than the thought that she had created a mild sensation.

They lingered over their morning meal with a pleasant laziness which was not often permitted in that well-ordered house. The breakfast-room, in which they were sitting, was only divided from the drawing-room by a door and a curtain. The windows of both these rooms overlooked the garden.

It was still raining. The little rustic summer-house was surrounded with dripping shrubs and leafless sticks and trailers; not a vestige of the golden days remained. Dead leaves, wet and shiny, were scattered over the neat gravel walks: there were small pools here and there. Grandma touched the bell to summon Barbara, and turned her chair away from the window.

"I don't want to look out of doors to-day," she said, drawing nearer to the fire. "Bring me my knitting, Tracy; it has been neglected lately. Rainy days are good for work. Are you going to do any darning?"

Tracy took her work-basket out of the cupboard at the bottom of the book-case and looked ruefully at a little pile of hose. Then her face brightened.

She sat down on the other side of the fire and set to work in real earnest, feeling that grandma eyed her with a glance of approval.

"After all, grandma," she remarked, "there is nothing that becomes a girl so well as to sit quietly at needle-work. Not fancy-work, you know, but good, homely sewing or darning."

"I quite agree with you," Mrs. Taunton replied, "and I wish you had seen the beauty of darning earlier in life."

"It is never too late to darn," said Tracy cheerfully. "I think I look nicer now than when I am in my studio, knitting my brows and rumpling my hair. I will devote one day every week to this domestic occupation. We get on very well together, don't we, granny? You are not tired of me, are you?"

"I have never been tired of you, my dear; and I never shall be," Mrs. Taunton answered. "As you are so happy in this simple home life, you do well to go on living in it while it lasts. I suppose it is a mistake to be over-anxious about your future."

"My future! It seems as far off now as it did when I was a child," said Tracy, in her clear, sweet voice. And she dropped her work to look out into the garden with dreamy eyes.

At the sound of the door-bell grandma started. The peal resounded through the quiet house, breaking up the calm enjoyment of the two women who sat by the fire.

"I knew he would come," said Mrs. Taunton, drawing a long breath.

"Never mind, grandma. The earlier he comes, the sooner it will be over."

Tracy rose, drew herself up with the air of a princess, and went quietly into the drawing-room to receive her lover. No sooner had she gone than grandma, anxious and tremulous, softly unclosed the door of communication without disturbing the folds

of the curtain. She could hear the two voices with perfect distinctness.

"Tracy," said Alfred, advancing quickly and taking her hand in a strong clasp.

At his touch a little shiver of cold ran through her. She tried to draw her hand away, but he held it fast and drew her closer to him.

"Won't you look at me, dear, and let me speak to you?" he went on. "We will forget all about yesterday and begin again. When girls are angry they say a thousand things that they don't mean. I am sure that you do not really want to give me up. I can't believe it."

"We must part," she said quietly. "Alfred, you must set me free. It will be better for us both."

As she spoke she made a resolute effort to release herself from his hold. But he would not let her go. With his natural vanity and arrogance he refused to accept the unwelcome truth. "To begin with," he argued mentally, "she is a woman, and therefore to be won. I want her and she is mine." He had expected that there would be little difficulties to overcome. Tracy was prouder than most girls; for pride's sake she would keep him at arm's-length for a time. But he truly believed that he should conquer in the end. Patience and perseverance, he thought, were needed here.

"You are tired," he said gently. "I never saw you look so pale. Darling, I am sorry that you were distressed; I know that you are delicate and oversensitive; the things that upset you would not disturb other girls at all. You can't expect a man to be quite perfect, you know."

"Love does not expect perfection," she answered, still turning her face away from him.

"Then why do you quarrel with me for not being altogether faultless? I was in a passion yesterday, and you were angry. Can you not forgive and forget?"

She stood facing him like a statue, silent and immovable. Then she lifted her eyes to his, and her fixed gaze seemed to look him through and through.

"Alfred," she said at last, "before yesterday I knew that I had made a mistake. I have known for many bitter weeks that the love which I promised to give you was lacking. I had searched for it diligently in my heart and could not find it; but you had my promise, and I meant to keep it."

"And you must keep it, Tracy." A hot flush mounted to his forehead.

"No, I must not." Her glance did not quail before his rising fury. "Yesterday I—almost hated you. I wish you would not make me say these things. I want to part with you quietly and peacefully. Will you not go now and leave me?"

"I will not go," he said hoarsely. "I have looked upon you as a part of my own life, and I refuse to give you up."

To such a love as his hate is always a very near neighbor. If the look on his face meant anything at that moment, he was not far from wishing to silence forever the lips that bade him depart.

As they stood there, confronting each other, everything in their first meeting came back to her in a flash. She remembered that she had thought him like the portrait of Claverhouse in his early days; and she had even time to think that the natures of these two men—cruel, revengeful, and passionate—were as similar as their faces.

"I have not changed," he continued. "I came here this morning to hurry on our marriage. I will not leave the house without seeing Mrs. Taunton. Did she not favor me from the first? You know that she did; and you know, too, that she hates the thought of your giving me up. Tracy, you are a foolish, self-willed girl, full of ideal dreams that are too fine for sensible people to understand. I see your faults and absurdities; but, in spite of them all, you take

my fancy. And, by Heaven, I won't be cheated out of my desire! I'll marry you yet. When you struck me yesterday I only liked you the better for it."

He came closer to her, his eyes gleaming, his handsome face distorted with passion. The arm that he grasped bore the marks of his clutch imprinted on the soft flesh for days afterward.

"I am not afraid of you," she said coldly and haughtily. "You need not think to shake my resolution by violence. Let me go—you hurt my arm."

His answer was hissed into her ear with an oath, and his grasp tightened.

No sooner had an involuntary cry of pain escaped her than the curtain which masked the door was flung aside.

"Have you taken leave of your senses, Montjoy?" asked the rector, walking quietly into the room. "I want to have a word with you, if you please."

"Not now," Alfred answered, loosening his hold of Tracy and looking round with a startled air. "Not now; we are settling something——"

"We have settled everything," the girl interrupted. "I am tired and faint. There is no more to be said."

She vanished through the open door, which was instantly shut and locked by grandma's trembling hands. Alfred stood glaring at the folds of the curtain. He had no idea what he should do next.

But the rector's moment had come. He stepped up to the young man, laid a kind hand on his shoulder, and said a few words in a low voice. They were words that had an instantaneous effect. Alfred saw that it was time to go.

CHAPTER XXV

A GREAT CALM.

“Like veiled lightning asleep,
Like the spark nursed in embers,
The last look Love remembers;
Like a diamond which shines
On the dark wealth of the mines,
A spell is treasured but for thee alone.”

—SHELLEY.

“It hasn’t been too much for me at all, grandma,” gasped Tracy, bringing out each syllable with a painful effort. “Of course I am pale—I turn pale always when anything horrid takes place. Don’t be frightened, you dear old granny.”

“If I am not frightened,” rejoined Mrs. Taunton, struggling to be calm, “it is because I have bolted both doors and the window is secured. Also, I have good reasons for believing that the awful young man is gone. I hear the rector trying to get in at this moment.”

“Then do let him in,” said Tracy, sitting upright with a deep sigh of relief.

Grandma moved deliberately to the door, applied her ear to the crevice for an instant, and then slowly slipped back the bolt and opened it two or three inches.

“Come in, my dear old friend,” she said, with a gush of genuine feeling. “The child fainted; but she has come to herself again.”

“I didn’t faint,” declared Tracy feebly.

Grandma made a gesture, signifying that “the child” was not to be contradicted. Mr. Lazelle smiled and came over to the arm-chair. He took

one of Tracy's cold little hands in his—it was the left hand—and saw that she held the right arm stiffly.

"My poor little girl," he said, in his kindly voice, "I wish I could have spared you all this disturbance."

"I didn't deserve to be spared," she answered softly. "My own weakness is to blame for everything. I allowed myself to be talked into accepting him, although there was an inner voice which warned me."

"Don't stifle that voice again, Tracy," said the rector, with quiet earnestness. "Listen to the inward warnings, shut your ears to the outside world, and commune with your own heart."

"The Mystics of old days would have given the same counsel," remarked Tracy, a smile hovering round her lips.

"What do you know about the Mystics?" he asked. "Have they talked to you in the quietness of your little sanctum upstairs? Remember that I do not counsel you to retire altogether from the world; only beware of closing the interior senses. You know that there is an inner ear-gate through which divine voices enter."

"I have learned a lesson which will never be forgotten," said Tracy gently. "The words of the gypsy's warning will often come back to me—'Be more fearful of the companionship which enchains than of the solitude that leaves you free.' But, Mr. Lazelle, I was never afraid of solitude; it was grandma who feared it for me."

"Yes," he answered; "I saw your danger. You listened to the outward instead of the inward voice."

Mrs. Taunton had gone off in search of eau-de-cologne; and Tracy, soothed by the rector's quiet voice, lay back restfully in the large arm-chair. The rain had ceased to fall; the clouds had broken, and faint silvery gleams were shining over the wet garden.

Her face was still perfectly colorless; even the lips had paled; and when her weary eyes were half-closed, the long lashes looked jet-black on the white cheek. As she tried to move her arm, there was a little quiver of pain about the mouth which made Mr. Lazelle's heart hot within him.

"I wish he had hurt the left arm," she murmured, after a pause. "I—I do want to get back to my painting, you know."

This was the only kind of complaint which she was ever heard to make of Alfred's brutality. It had been her own fault, she said, all her own fault. Grandma, who now shuddered demonstratively at the mention of his name, would have abused him unsparingly if Tracy had not gently silenced her.

"I made him suffer," she remarked, opening her tired eyes a little wider and looking appealingly at the rector. "It must not be forgotten that I exasperated him very much. And he is not used to being thwarted, you see. It is a terrible misfortune to go through one's childhood and youth without experiencing the wholesome discipline of being sat upon."

"There is a good deal of the brute in him," said Mr. Lazelle, "and I should have liked to horsewhip him to-day," he added with an unusual outburst of temper. "I hope I did not let him off too easily."

Tracy's eyes opened a little wider still.

"How did you make him go?" she asked.

"A very few words did it," the rector replied with rather a grim smile. "I chanced to know something which there is now no need for you to know."

"Ah," said Tracy, with a long sigh of intense relief. She did not ask any more questions, but rested in the chair, leaning her head upon its back and looking dreamily before her. The day brightened; there was more of the silver and less of the gray, and here and there the glitter of the rain-pools lit up the drenched garden-walks. It all seemed

sweet to Tracy, with the new sweetness that a heart at ease finds in familiar things.

"It is good to sit here at peace," she said, in a gentle, musing voice. "I don't think I ever loved that old garden as well as I do to-day, although it has scarcely a flower to boast of. I wonder if I shall feel anything like this when the imperishable part of me is separated from the perishable? Will well-known scenes be sweeter to the released spirit than they were before it was set free?"

Mr. Lazelle smiled.

"One always asks those questions when one is in a peaceful mood, Tracy," he replied. "Peace is so rare on earth that when it comes it gives us a disembodied feeling. As to what you ask—well, it is enough for us to believe that all our innocent loves will survive the body's decay. But it is not those old trees and walks that you really love. It is the love within you that flows out over them, and makes them dear. Don't you remember what Keble says?

"Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be
As more of heaven in each we see."

"That is true enough; but the heaven must be in ourselves, and its light must shine from within us on the outer world, or friends and scenes will lack their charm."

"Yes," said Tracy, with a little sigh. "Only there are some persons and some places which even the light from within us cannot glorify."

Grandma returned, looking more composed, and bringing a flask of eau-de-cologne. She had shut herself up for a little while in her own room, and had emerged from that sanctum in her second-best cap, trimmed with mauve ribbons; she had also donned a new kerchief, and a smart watered-silk apron. At the sight of the dear old lady in her festive array, Tracy uttered a cry of delight, and sat upright in her chair, with the brightness coming back to her eyes.

"I don't want any eau-de-cologne, grandma," she declared. "'Your beauty makes me glad,' as Wordsworth said about his little maiden. Not that you have 'a rustic woodland air,' and it cannot be said that you are 'wildly clad.' There is a dignity in your apparel which reminds me of all your past conquests. You might be the Dowager Lady Burrowfield at this moment!"

"No," said grandma, with a very decided shake of the head. "I rejoice to think that I am simply Mrs. Taunton, widow of one of the best and kindest of men. Lord Burrowfield had a temper, my dear. I once heard that he gave his wife a beating. It was a good providence that removed him from my path."

She stood in front of Tracy's chair, and looked at her with a critical gaze. There were dark circles round the girl's eyes that spoke of languor and pain; and after considering her for a moment in silence grandma shook her head again.

"You must go to bed, my child," she said tenderly. "We will have a fire in your room, and I shall come up there to sit with you. All that you need is a good rest."

An hour later, when Tracy was lying quietly in her white nest, she felt that her grandmother had done wisely in sending her there. Her powers had been overtaxed that day; the long strain of worry and perplexity was over; but it had left her worn and weak.

It comforted her not a little to feel that no one would take it amiss if she were to fall ill; and it was this very thought that saved her from serious illness. She had only to lie on her pillow, and recover her strength; grandma would not require her to get strong all at once. There was leisure now for peace and reflection, while the tired frame was resting, and the weary heart beating quietly. As she lay there in the stillness, sheltered by her fresh white curtains, she began to realize that she was not,

and never had been, a strong woman—not half as strong, for example, as Grace Endon.

The dusk came soon; the fire flickered in the twilight; grandma dozed in an arm-chair by the bedside. The chill evening wind was whispering outside the pane with muffled sighs and stealthy sounds; but they did not sadden Tracy. A time was coming when she should stroll through summer lanes, drinking in the dewy breath of the clematis, and listening to the blackbird's hymn. And again the dream-faces of long ago began to rise out of the shadows in the quiet room. Her knight seemed to smile down upon her with all the old grave sweetness in his eyes. Where, in this world, should she ever meet the gaze of eyes like his? Nowhere, perhaps; but the dream-hero had never been so dear as now.

"I have come back to him," she thought. "For months I have been wandering in a barren and dry land with strange companions. Nothing ever seemed real to me there; it was like a child's feverish dream of flowers without perfume, and fruit without taste. Now I am awake again, and my spirit has rejoined its mate. We shall never be parted any more."

Three or four days went by while Tracy rested in her peaceful room upstairs. She did not know what Ferngate was saying of her, nor did she care. Grandma had sent a packet of golden gifts back to the giver; and the rector was going about, industriously explaining that the two young people had never suited each other. Meanwhile, for Tracy there was a great calm.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GRACE'S HOPES.

"The soldier frae the war returns,
And the merchant frae the main,
But I hae parted wi' my love,
And ne'er to meet again."

—OLD BALLAD.

"AND the best of it all is that she did it herself." It was the day after that memorable parting in the drawing-room at the Laurels. The three ladies at the Court were sitting round the fire in the library, enjoying afternoon tea and the usual chat. It was Grace who had said those words in a tone of undisguished triumph. Mrs. Endon glanced up at her daughter warningly, but she was answered with an exulting smile.

Never, in the whole course of her decorous life, had Grace Endon felt as girlishly joyous as she did that day. Her winter dress of rich purple cloth had come down safely from town, and was found to be an admirable fit. She had put it on that morning with the conviction that it was a victor's robe; and her self-confidence gave brightness to her eyes and cheeks.

"She did it herself," she repeated. "Well, after this, mamma, I think we shall all believe in gypsy fortune-telling!"

"Grace, you must promise not to go near the gypsies," said Mrs. Endon, stirring her tea uneasily.

"I promise willingly enough, mamma. There are no gypsies in the woods now. They have all gone away."

"I am very glad to hear it," replied Mrs. Endon.

Lady Montjoy, with a well-contented air, was seated in a velvet-covered chair, and looked every inch the lady of the house. She felt that she was re-established securely in her proud position. She detested Tracy more than ever for having slighted her son; but, although she talked freely of the girl's insolence and heartlessness, she was rejoiced at what she termed the deliverance.

"Tracy Taunton is deeper than we ever suspected," she said. "It is my belief that she thought her power was waning. That is what I shall tell my friends; I think she has taken care of herself."

It sometimes seems doubtful whether any one has ever heard the true story of a broken match. Such a vast amount of ingenuity is always expended on the matter by the jilted one and his friends, that few outsiders ever behold the unadorned truth. Lady Montjoy was perfectly aware that she was going to tell a string of fibs; she knew quite well that Alfred had passionately desired to hold the girl who had torn herself free; but her conscience, as John Bunyan would have said, was seared with a hot iron. And Grace, who listened and smiled, was ready to pretend that she was right.

"Alfred will go on better now," the mother continued. "I shall have my boy again; he was another person while that horrid girl held him in her net. If she had been at all nice she would have set him free sooner, and in a pleasanter fashion."

"She was determined to have a quarrel and make a scene," remarked Grace.

"It was very clumsily done," said Lady Montjoy, with a sneer. "And I always knew that she was incapable of loving any one. She liked to dream away her time over her painting; if her grandmother had not roused her I don't think she would have had energy enough to ensnare Alfred. I never liked her from the first. She was not in the least like other girls."

"She went in for being peculiar," Grace observed, making a little grimace. "It is a good thing, you know, that she *can* paint. If she doesn't marry she will have to get her own living one of these days."

"Yes; I think she paints well enough to be heard of as an artist," Lady Montjoy admitted. She had seen hundreds of pictures abroad and knew a little about art. "There really is a touch of genius in all that she does. She is the kind of young person who is intended by Providence to work for her bread; and she will succeed in earning it very well indeed."

"Sir Alfred does not care in the least for art," said Grace. "He never took any interest in her doings. They had no tastes in common."

Lady Montjoy gave her a swift glance, which Mrs. Endon saw and interpreted rightly. Grace was showing a trifle too much satisfaction in Alfred's release. And Grace herself, chancing to look up just then, suddenly discovered that she had made a little blunder.

It was not too late, she hoped, to retrieve her error. Her color deepened slightly, but she wisely refrained from saying anything more. Mrs. Endon, calm as ever, came skilfully to her daughter's assistance.

"I was saying to Grace only yesterday that Lady Catherine Dare would be the very girl for your son, Clara," she remarked, sipping her tea with an air of placid enjoyment. "She is very handsome, isn't she? And she has the love of field-sports and out-of-door games which would please Alfred. How well she looks on horseback!"

"Did you see the portrait of her, painted in her habit?" Grace asked, looking full at her hostess with a bright smile and innocent eyes. "It was very good indeed. It was the sort of picture that would look splendid hanging over this mantelpiece. But I suppose it would not be right to disturb that mighty warrior."

She gave an upward glance at the Montjoy in

armor frowning above the old chimney-piece of carved oak. Lady Montjoy seemed amused at the notion.

"Disturb him! My dear Grace, what a vivid imagination you have!" she exclaimed. "It is not at all likely that Catherine Dare's portrait will ever find a place in this house."

"More unlikely things have happened, haven't they?" Miss Endon said in a musing tone. "Mamma, you told me to write to Aunt Dorothy, and I have never done so yet. Talking of Lady Catherine reminded me of Aunt Dorothy. She is staying at the rectory, close to their place in the North. How frightfully cold it must be there!"

She rose deliberately and reluctantly, as she spoke, and went over to the writing-table, standing in one of the windows. She had often sat there to write Lady Montjoy's notes and her own letters, and the movement seemed perfectly easy and natural. But Mrs. Endon knew that she had seen her danger and had cleverly retired from perilous ground.

"You ought not to neglect your aunt, my dear," she said. "We have very few relations left, and Dorothy is really fond of you. Do you remember her, Clara? She was my husband's only sister, you know, and we always got on together very well."

"I haven't seen her for years," Lady Montjoy answered. "But she was very retty, I think, when she was young."

"Very pretty." Mrs. Endon set down her cup and saucer and took up her satin work-bag again. "Very pretty, and always light-hearted till Major Deerham crossed her path. He used her very badly; but I was always glad that she didn't marry him: and, really, she is one of the cheeriest old maids I have ever seen. People like her, and ask her to their houses."

"Ah, she is staying at Northernwood rectory," said Lady Montjoy, suddenly. "As you are writing,

Grace, I wish you would ask her if there is any truth in the rumor about Catherine Dare and Lord Gayworthy." There was nothing to be learnt from the back of Grace's neatly dressed brown head, and a second or two elapsed before she suffered her profile to be seen.

"I will ask Aunt Dorothy, of course," she said, quietly. "But is it at all likely that Lady Catherine's people will let her think of Lord Gayworthy? That affair of his with Psyche Morison has not blown over yet."

"The papers were full of it before I came home," Lady Montjoy answered thoughtfully. "Psyche Morison was a dancer, wasn't she? Oh yes, I recollect it all now; Lord Gayworthy is a dreadful man. I should think the rumor couldn't be true."

"How did you hear it, Clara?" asked Mrs. Endon, setting her stitches as carefully as ever.

"Fanny Marstone mentioned it in one of her gossipy letters. I think she must have invented it. However, she really did state that Lord Rooksley had invited Gayworthy to Northernwood, and that he was always to be seen with Catherine."

"I do not believe that there is an atom of truth in it," said Mrs. Endon, taking a fresh needleful of silk. "But, Grace, you can ask your aunt to write by return. Dorothy is a woman who always knows everything."

"Very well," assented Grace from the writing-table, and her pen travelled speedily over the paper. She had stamped and addressed her letter when Mr. Roche came in, and walked up to her side.

"Sweets to the sweet," he said, laying a monthly rose upon the blotting-book.

Grace was unfeignedly surprised. She had known Walter Roche for years, and he had never made her a pretty speech nor given her a flower before. With a smile of thanks she looked up at the tall blond young man; and came suddenly to the conclusion

that he was in a good humor with himself and all the world.

Yet his face was as tranquil as ever. There was, however, a gleam of brightness in the gray eyes that were usually rather dull and moved slowly under their heavy lids. Roche was a languid man who gave one the impression of being utterly unemotional. His was the eternal calm of the Sphinx; he seemed to be perpetually looking on as the processions of life filed past him, quite unmoved by eager faces or weary ones, quite untouched by gay voices or sad.

Although not rich he was by no means poor enough to plead poverty as an excuse for remaining a bachelor. He could have afforded to marry if he had been a marrying man. But all attempts to win him had hitherto been met with such polished and gentle indifference that maids and matrons had given him up. He was one of the most courteous men in the world; but is there any one more difficult to conquer than a person who enfolds himself in a mantle of perfect courtesy? You may smite a warrior between the joints of his harness; but there is no exposed spot in the garb of the accomplished worldling.

Not for a moment did Grace misunderstand his little compliment. She knew that he was as cold to her now as he had been any time within the past five or six years. She felt sure that he had merely paid her this small attention because he was glad of something.

And yet, what was there to make him glad? Grace recalled a certain evening when she had asked him what he thought of Miss Taunton, and remembered his hesitation in answering. There is a good deal to be learnt from a man's silence; in nine cases out of ten he thinks oftenest of the woman whose name he seldom speaks. When they were all discussing the broken match, Walter Roche had said as little as it was possible for any one to say. As a matter of fact,

he had always been oddly disinclined to talk about Tracy at all.

Miss Endon went upstairs to dress for dinner, carrying the rose in her hand, and caring very little about it. She put on her favorite gown; but the first brightness of her atmosphere seemed to have become heavy, and she glanced around the room with a sense of dreariness. Alfred was free, it was true, but he did not yet belong to her. She was as far as ever from being the lady of Woodcourt.

As she stood upon the hearth looking down into the fire, her mother quietly opened the door. Grace glanced up, not sorry to see the familiar figure in the black silk robe and white lace cap. It was curious, she thought a moment after, that the mere sight of such a well-known person should bring a sense of comfort with it this evening. Her mother had not always been so warmly welcomed. Grace made a swift involuntary movement toward her.

"Mamma," she said, "I believe I am a little nervous. Somehow, I am afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing."

"You are cold," replied Mrs. Endon, taking the hand that her daughter half unconsciously held out. "Yes, you are positively shivering. It is a sharp night; there is a change in the weather."

"I don't think the weather affects me, mamma."

"Yes, it does. And that crimson dress is too thin. Take it off, and put on your black velvet."

Grace obeyed mechanically, too much depressed to rely upon her own judgment. Mrs. Endon proceeded to arrange the gown with deft, quiet touches; then she folded a large kerchief of soft yellowish muslin about the shivering shoulders, and tied it in a loose knot. There was a bright red camellia on the table, and she set it daintily into the folds of lace toilet and muslin. "You look much better now," she said. "Sit down by the fire. There is really nothing to trouble you. Clara has returned to her old idea of

getting Catherine Dare for Alfred. But it is quite hopeless. Catherine will marry Gayworthy—I am certain of it."

"Aunt Dorothy will know," remarked Grace.

She was feeling comfortable again. The shivering fit was over, and her usual composure had come back. It was a relief to know that her mother, who was not of a sanguine temper, thought hopefully of the state of affairs. Mrs. Endon sat down on the opposite side of the fire, and folded her hands on her lap.

"No one could have expected that Tracy would throw Alfred over," she said. "I did not; it seemed impossible that such a thing could happen. Mind, Grace; I do not think that he will make the best of husbands; but I can see that your heart is set upon him. And I believe that you have a fair chance of obtaining your desire."

"Lady Montjoy will set herself against me," Grace replied. "If it were not for her——"

"My dear child, can you not see that she has very little influence? When she finds that Catherine Dare is lost to her, she will regard you more favorably. Far better that he should choose an old friend than fall in love with another nobody! Take courage, Grace."

CHAPTER XXVII.

WON.

“I that have slept, awake, and you
Sleep, who last year were well awake:
Though love do all that love can do,
My love will never ache or break
For your heart’s sake.”

—SWINBURNE.

As the dreary days went and came, Alfred was glad that the Endons stayed on in the house. Roche had left him, “selfish fellow, that Roche,” and had gone to spend a week with the Arundels at Ferngate. Some other men had been asked to Woodcourt, and were coming. Meanwhile, there was a spell of dullness which Grace knew well how to enliven.

She noticed that he shunned the walks that led to the lake. And in truth that wide sheet of dark water, fringed all round with brown rushes and half-stripped trees, was by no means a cheerful spot. Alfred would have gone away; but arrangements had been made to spend Christmas at the Court, and it would have been inconvenient to alter his plans.

He never knew how it was that he began to talk with Grace about his lost love. Perhaps Grace knew. She was well aware of the advantage which a woman gains over a man when she becomes his confidante. And she was one of the best of listeners, saying just enough to express her sympathy; never once committing the blunder of abusing Tracy too much.

She would wonder, in a cooing murmur, how Tracy could be so indifferent to the prize that she had won.

She would hint, quite intelligibly, the high value that other women would set upon that prize. Very carefully she followed Alfred's moods as far as she could divine them, and he liked her; she fitted into all the grooves of his habits and tastes.

Three days went by, and on the fourth Grace came down to breakfast with an open letter in her hand.

The breakfast-room, situated on the eastern side of the house, was a comfortable apartment, into which the gray light of the winter morning found its way. It was carefully curtained with heavy draperies, and warmed by a blazing fire; but when Grace entered she found Lady Montjoy looking ruefully out over the misty grounds. Alfred had come down stairs in a bad temper, anathematizing the horrible climate, and openly declaring his intention to commit suicide in the course of the next hour or two. He greeted Grace with gloomy politeness.

"It is certainly a most depressing morning," said his mother with a sigh. "You don't mind these foggy days, Grace? Perhaps you have had good news?"

"No," Grace answered, looking serious, and handing the letter to her hostess. "Please read what Aunt Dorothy says. One really can't help being sorry for Lady Catherine."

"Then it *is* true." Lady Montjoy's face looked more worn than usual as she stood by the window. The lines about the mouth deepened, the cheeks seemed to fall in. Everything was going against her. She read the first page of the letter in silence, and returned it to Grace with another sigh.

"Mother, how doleful you are!" cried Alfred with a sudden burst of irritability. "What has happened to Catherine Dare? For my part, I don't see how anything can happen to such a tremendously strong woman unless she has been kicked off her horse! and that's hardly possible, with such a seat as she has!"

"She is going to marry Lord Gayworthy," said Grace, demurely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Alfred's laugh was so genuine that Grace adroitly turned her face from Lady Montjoy. She knew how intensely irritating that spontaneous outburst of mirth must be to the thwarted schemer; but she could not repress her own desire to smile.

"Poor Gayworthy! He'll run away from her before six months are over his head. Ha! ha!"

"You are always unjust to any favorite of mine, Alfred," said Lady Montjoy, with some temper. "Catherine is a bright, vigorous woman, and it is to be hoped that she will reform him."

"It's to be hoped that she will, mother. But men of Gayworthy's stamp are not usually tamed by Amazons." Mrs. Endon, who came in at that moment, was inwardly much amused and delighted. But her sympathetic greeting to her friend was perfect.

"I know how grieved you must be, Clara; you knew her so well. It must be a great surprise."

"I don't think anything will ever surprise me again," rejoined Lady Montjoy in a dreary tone.

Grace did not venture to exchange a glance with her mother as they sat down to breakfast. She allowed her host to catch a glimpse of the fun that sparkled in her eyes, and then devoted herself to her plate. There was not much to be got from her in the way of conversation that morning. Mrs. Endon talked in her usual mild strain, and poured oil upon the troubled waters.

"You don't mind fog, do you?" said Alfred to Grace, as they rose from the table. "It's a horrid morning, I know; but I've made up my mind to walk to Ferngate. There's a pony there that I want to see. Will you come too?"

Grace detested fog, and never took long walks if she could help it. But if he had asked her to walk

to the Land's End she would have complied cheerfully.

"I shall be glad to come," she said. "Are we to start at once?"

"Yes; before the weather gets any worse," he replied. The mother and daughter had hoped for a confidential chat after breakfast. They were drawing nearer to each other now, and there were no secrets between them. Mrs. Endon made an excuse to follow Grace upstairs.

"There never was such extraordinary good fortune as yours," said the widow softly, when they were alone. "Clara is thoroughly crushed by Lady Catherine's engagement. I don't think she will object to anything now. As to Alfred, he is really too hard on her. He won't be an easy husband to manage, Grace."

"Well, mamma, I like him," Grace answered simply. "I don't look forward to a life of perfect ease. Doesn't some one say that every marriage is more or less a failure? But to get one's desire, that is the only thing which makes existence tolerable."

"My dear," said Mrs. Endon, "I think it is rather dangerous to have strong feelings. You will make an excellent match, and I am sure you will be a good wife; but nothing is more disappointing than a granted wish. I have lived in the world too long not to know what follows the attainment of a desire."

"Doesn't it strike you that we are talking quite bookishly?" asked Grace, fastening her sealskin jacket with a well-contented air. "I have never been given to sentiment, have I! And I won't let it run away with my brain."

Mrs. Endon's smile expressed confidence.

"You were always a sensible girl," she said. "When the matter is really arranged, I suppose Clara will find a new home. It would not be quite nice if she lived here."

"It wouldn't be nice at all," responded Grace,

with great decision. "No one annoys Alfred as his mother does. Indeed, I think she is to be blamed for a great deal of his bad temper. When I am mistress here she must go."

"Clara was always imperious," Mrs. Endon remarked. "At school she tried to manage everything for everybody, and she has been doing it ever since. What do you mean to do with me, Grace?"

"I mean to keep you with me, mamma. You will be useful in all sorts of ways, and I don't want to part with you."

They kissed each other almost as affectionately as if they had not been a couple of worldly schemers. Grace gave a final touch to the pretty purple hat which matched her gown, and moved toward the door.

"Mamma," she said, over her shoulder, "don't forget to have some wine and biscuits up here. I shall be a perfect wreck when I come back."

Lady Montjoy, who had repaired, as usual, to the library, was too much dispirited to watch the pair set out. She was, as her friend had said, quite crushed by the failure of her last plan. She had pretended that she had given up all thought of the Dare alliance; but hope had still lingered in her heart. If her son ever married now, she knew that it would not be a bride of her choosing; her approval would be the very thing which he least desired.

Mrs. Endon, coming in with her work-bag on her arm, found her sitting by the fire in a melancholy mood, and set herself to chase the gloom away.

The whole land was gray that morning. The crows flapped their inky wings and vanished as if the mist had swallowed them up; the farm-house dogs were mute; there was no sound of opening gates; no tramp of hoofs along the road. As Alfred walked on, with Grace by his side, he recalled the aspect of that road in the early summer. How the roses had flung their blossoms over those bare thorns!

How the butterflies had fluttered in the sunshine! He thought of Tracy's dark gray eyes, shining steadily under their black lashes, and remembered the scent of the bunch of honeysuckle, worn in the soft folds of her bodice, and then he stifled a curse, and quickened his pace.

"I'm a dull companion, Grace," he said abruptly. "And that old house of mine is as gloomy as a tomb. By Jove, I'll do something to enliven it. I'll fill it with people from top to bottom; I'll give a ball, and ask the whole county."

"It would be delightful to have a ball at Woodcourt!" Grace was gently enthusiastic in a moment. "There hasn't been one there for more than twenty years. A ball on New Year's night would be lovely."

"We'll make out a list," said Alfred, trying to get up an interest in his project. "And you must ask some friends of your own—nice girls, you know."

"Lady Montjoy knows plenty of girls," Grace rejoined quietly. "Mamma talks of going away soon; she thinks of settling somewhere in London. We have been wanderers so long, and her only brother is there."

Her words had the effect that she desired. As they walked onward into the mist, it suddenly occurred to Alfred that Woodcourt, without the Endons, would be absolutely intolerable. Even with Grace in it the place was detestable enough; but, if she were no longer there, it would be impossible to endure the horrible gloom of his abode. Not being an affectionate man, he did not hesitate to say to himself that his mother was a disagreeable person. Lady Montjoy and her son had not been in the habit of living together till they came to the Court; and they had been giving and taking offence ever since they had lived under one roof.

He looked down at Grace in her sealskin jacket and beecoming hat. She was a nice-looking, everyday woman of the world, with nothing to distinguish her

from other women of her class. He was not in love with her in the least. Love—if it *had* been love which had seized him in its grasp—was a thing that gave you no rest, and made you torment yourself and every one around you. That was the feeling which Tracy had inspired; but (although he hated her for not returning it) he knew that she had not tried to inspire it. She had not wanted him to love her. But for grandma and his own passionate pleadings, she would have smiled upon him calmly and gone on her way.

“You must not dream of leaving us yet,” he said, in a very decided voice. “I won’t hear of it.”

Grace liked his words none the worse because his tone was masterful.

“I don’t want to leave Woodcourt. It is the dearest old place in the world,” she replied.

“I think it’s a beastly place,” said Alfred. “But I’m glad you like it. And if you are contented, it’s sheer nonsense to talk about going away.”

“I am afraid Lady Montjoy will be tired of us,” Grace suggested timidly.

“She has never shown that she is tired of you, has she?”

“Oh, no; she is always kind. But mamma says that we ought not to stay too long.”

They walked on for some paces in silence. The gray veil still hung between them and the landscape, but it was a little thinner now. Grace could see the lych-gate, and the dark forms of the yews, as they went by the churchyard. Then a farmer’s boy came whistling along, and crossing a stile, vanished from sight as if by magic. She began to feel her heart beating violently; would Alfred never speak again?

“Look here, Grace,” he said at last, “I’m pretty sure that I should miss you if you went away. You’re a pleasant woman, and you light up all the place. I’m sure you don’t want to hear any sentimental talk from me; I’ve done with sentiment; but

if you'll marry me, and be mistress of the Court, there's no reason why we shouldn't get on together."

"I think we can get on very well together," responded Grace cheerfully.

She did not quarrel with this prosaic wooing. Alfred had spoken definitely, without any circumlocution, and she was abundantly contented.

Mrs. Endon, having spent the long morning in listening to Lady Montjoy's grievances, and administering consolation, contrived to slip away from her friend at last. Then she betook herself to Grace's room, and watched from the window with a flush of anxiety on her faded face.

At last she saw them coming toward the house; the mist was only a dimness now, and she could distinguish their faces. Grace gave a quick upraised glance, which spoke volumes to the watcher overhead. Mrs. Endon drew a long breath, and moved away to a chair by the fire to wait for her daughter's footsteps. They came at length. The door opened, and she entered.

"It is all settled," she said. "He has asked me to be his wife. But oh, mamma, I will never take any long walks after I'm married! Look at the mud on my skirt! And I am deadly tired; but it is all right."

CHAPPTER XXVIII.

PEACEFUL HOURS.

“Glimpses of immortal youth,
Gleams and glories seen and flown,
Far-heard voices sweet with truth,
Airs from viewless Edens blown.”

—WHITTIER.

TRACY, still regarded by all around her as an invalid, revived considerably when she heard of Alfred's engagement. She was even grateful to Grace for accepting him, and prophesied happiness for the pair with a confidence which astonished grandma.

“There can be no happiness when a man has Alfred's temper,” Mrs. Taunton said. She could not forgive him for being so easily consoled.

“Grace is much better suited to him than I was,” Tracy answered. “She will not provoke him as I did. Of course my provocation was not intentional; but I used to see that I did not do him any good, and I couldn't mend the matter. Dear grandma, I am rejoiced to know that he has lost the sense of loss!”

“How do you know that he has?” grandma demanded. “It is too soon. If he had waited a little longer before he reëngaged himself it would have been more dignified. However, if the news has made you happy I am glad. Of course *I* can see that he has merely asked the girl to take him out of pique!”

Tracy, resting deliciously on the couch in the breakfast-room, closed her eyes with a sense of peace.

The rector came to sit by her sofa, and bring her the first number of a new magazine. The tidings

of Alfred's engagement had not astonished him in the least; but over Miss Endon's chance of happiness he shook his head.

Christmas came and passed tranquilly with the little household at the Laurels. Tracy seemed to be a child again, enjoying simple pleasures with a child's unalloyed delight. Mrs. Taunton's kindly nature was no longer restrained by her ambition; she welcomed little Ben and his mother with all the hearty good will of former days, and Jane Shaw's heart was full of thankfulness and peace.

They never talked about Alfred. His name would be no more found in the record of Tracy's life, and those who loved her soon ceased to be interested in him. While Tracy was in her room upstairs, Mr. Lazelle and grandma had had a serious conversation, and if there had been any lingering regret in the old lady's mind it passed away forever. So glad was she now that Tracy was free, that she cared nothing at all for the gossips of Ferngate. But the gossips, after all her fears, had very little to say. There were those in the old town who knew Sir Alfred Montjoy better than Mrs. Taunton and her grandchild had ever known him. Tracy had been less envied than grandma had supposed; and there was a good deal of quiet joy over her release.

She was a girl who had made many friends and few enemies. The petty tittle-tattle, which flows so freely from the lips of most women, was never heard from hers. Her fun was devoid of the least flavor of malice; she was seldom known to tease any one but grandma. Deep down below the bright composure of her usual manner there were unsuspected passions, smouldering fires, an intensity of love and hate which had only blazed out once or twice in her life. People sometimes thought that Tracy had no depth of feeling; but this was only because the feeling lay too deep to be roused easily.

One day, when she was walking along the High

Street of the quiet old town, some one came suddenly out of a shop and advanced to meet her. It was Walter Roche, who had been lingering about Ferngate in the hope of seeing her again.

The morning air was cold and clear, and Tracy wore a large fur collar over her gray cloak. Her face looked more pure and delicate than ever against the dark fur; but Roche saw that the outline of her cheek had gained roundness and her lips had lost their sad curve. She was happier now. Her smile was spontaneous as she met his eyes.

"You are looking well," he said, with his usual calm air, but there was a faint flush on his face.

"Yes, I am well," she replied; "and grandma is very bright. There is something exhilarating in January sunshine."

"This is a pleasant old town," he remarked, beginning to walk by her side. "A nice, clean old place, where there is no haste or turmoil. I should like to live here."

"You would get tired of the pleasantness and cleanliness," she said. "After a little while you would pine for haste and turmoil. Ferngate is only fit for comfortable old gentlemen and elderly spinsters to live in."

"It would just suit me," he persisted. "I am fully determined to be a comfortable old gentleman. I don't expect too much, and there is plenty of rational entertainment to be had everywhere."

"I am very happy here myself," she admitted, "but I think that I used up all the rational entertainment in Ferngate long ago. My work entertains me. The winter days are too short for all that I want to do while the light lasts."

"Are you so busy in your studio?" he asked. "Shall you send anything to the Royal Academy?" She shook her head gently and smiled.

"Not yet—perhaps, never," she answered. "One dreams of doing great things, and meanwhile one

works away at little things. The dreams help on the work in a wonderful way."

He looked at her again, and was struck with the expression of content on her face. When they paused at the gate of the Laurels, he hoped that she would ask him to come in. But she did not. She was in a hurry to get back to grandma and her studio; besides, Walter Roche reminded her of the Montjoys, and all that she wanted to forget.

"It is too soon yet," he found himself saying inwardly as he walked away. He hardly knew what he had been wishing for and hungering after, until he had actually seen her again.

There were grand doings at the Court, where every one was getting ready for the advent of the bride. Grace and her mother were in town, making their preparations with all speed, for the wedding was to take place early in March. Lady Montjoy had parted with her future daughter-in-law without much effusion, and had coldly promised to be present at the ceremony if she felt well enough to stand it. Even Mrs. Endon's patience had given way under this strain. She felt that she had a right to expect more cordiality from her old friend. As to Grace, she was inwardly determined to see as little as possible of the dowager.

"No one can get on with her, mamma," she said. "All our blandishments are thrown away. Now that I am sure of Alfred, I shall give her up entirely."

The bleak days came and went; the snow fell, muffling grandma's garden with a swan's-down robe; and Tracy played at snow-balling with little Ben. There were peaceful mornings spent in the studio; cheery afternoons, when Mr. Lazelle occupied his favorite chair at the tea-table; pleasant evenings, when Mrs. Taunton knitted in the lamp-light, and her granddaughter read aloud. And then the winter gave tokens of departure; little cold-faced flowers began to appear here and there, and there were spring

scents in the keen morning wind. One day Tracy took up the paper, and read the announcement of Alfred's marriage.

"I *do* hope they will be happy," she said heartily. "Poor Grace—it is a terrible risk."

It was always a custom for Mrs. Taunton to go up to town in May, taking Tracy with her to see the shows and study the fashions. They stayed at an old-fashioned hotel near Charing Cross, where the same sober set of people came year after year—people who never interfered with each other, nor felt any curiosity about each other's doings. And Tracy, who loved London with all her heart, spent a happy month in going where she liked, and taking her fill of picture-galleries. Once she caught a glimpse of Sir Alfred Montjoy and his bride, as they descended the steps of the Metropole, and got into a carriage. Grace was beautifully dressed, and carried herself with a well-bred consciousness of her new dignity. Alfred's face was deeply flushed; the melancholy expression, which had lent a charm to his handsome features, had deepened into savage gloom. Tracy was sorry for them both.

She met Mr. Roche at Burlington House and elsewhere, and presented him to grandma. The old lady was delighted with the tall young man, who listened to her remarks with deferential attention. She declared, after that meeting, that she had always admired those calm, unemotional men, who spoke in a level voice, and moved slowly.

"It is very odd that we so often come across him," said Tracy.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A PARTING.

“But now we parted, never more
To meet upon that lone sea-shore;
We have not met on earth again,
And scarcely shall; there doth remain
A time, a place where we shall meet,
And have the stars beneath our feet.”

—TRENCH.

TRACY was sitting on a warm slope of shingle, looking out with half-closed eyes over a great waste of blue. The heat of a glaring July day was over; the long afternoon was gliding into evening; and the girl, whose clear, pale skin was freshened by the sea-breaths, sat there in restful content. Beside her lay her sketch-book, and the tin box containing pencils and colors. She had been working industriously for an hour and more, and this was the time for musing in quietness. Nobody wanted her indoors. Grandma was at the open window with Laura, whose children were playing just outside the house.

The Dawleys and the Tauntons had taken up their abode in a little white villa, remote from the watering-place, and out of the sound of bands and promenaders; and Tracy spent many hours in solitude. The waves carried her thoughts away to the dim horizon line, and then brought them back to her feet, laden with hints of a fair future. The old sea-voice, murmuring its summer tale, was ever sweet in her ears. It was a time for dreamy questions and mysterious replies; a time of listening, and gazing, and wondering, while the warm days came and went, and nature seemed half asleep.

There was a great calm and stillness here. Now and then a burst of laughter from the children came faintly through the quiet air; but Tracy, lost in her reverie, heard nothing but the sea. It was not until a footstep crushed the shingle near, that she turned round, and found herself face to face with Walter Roche.

"I hope I have not startled you," he said, speaking more rapidly than usual. "I called on Mrs. Taunton, and she told me that I should find you on the beach."

"We did not expect any callers in this out-of-the-way place," she answered, smiling. "How did you know that we were here?"

"I have been staying at Ferngate with the Arundels. They mentioned that you had gone to the seaside; and I wanted change of air. So I came."

He sat down beside her on the shingle, and began to pick up stones with his long, slender fingers, looking at her all the time with quiet attention. She gazed at the sea a few seconds under the soft shadow of her black lashes, and then turned her face toward him.

"You have a fancy for dull places," she said lightly.

"Do you call this dull?" he asked. "Don't you find that this kind of dulness is infinitely more enlivening than society? I am generally supposed to be a frivolous society man; I've been handing about ices and carrying shawls for years, and people have been good enough to tell me that I have made myself agreeable. But lately, I've been out of humor with my lot. I don't want to be dawdling and drifting forever."

"Then don't dawdle and drift," said Tracy, with a little smile. "Do something better."

He was conscious that those deep eyes of hers were resting upon him with a look of reflection.

"That is equivalent to saying 'begin life anew,'

isn't it?" he remarked. "Well, I think that's the only thing to be done. And I must ask some one to help me."

Even then, Tracy had no suspicion of the truth. Her mind was pre-occupied with

"Duties enough, and little cares;"

and it merely struck her as passing strange that a lazy fellow should take her into his confidence. She could understand that he was weary of the life that he had been leading. It must be extremely tiresome, she thought, to go on living as if you were a creature with neither soul nor purpose; and she had really liked Walter Roche quite well enough to wonder at the aimlessness of his existence.

"Can't you take more interest in things?" she asked, with a touch of soft kindness in her voice. "One's life is in one's own hands. There are some who go sauntering over their piece of ground, and others who break it up, and sow it with good seed. I am afraid this sounds rather like a bit out of a sermon."

"I wish I could hear such bits oftener," he said, with a slight quiver in his tone. At that moment he felt how full of all tender sympathy and kindly thought she was, and longed to secure her perpetual companionship. But what was there in him that she should respond to his desire? It spoke well for him that he blamed no one but himself for his wasted years; and that he was more deeply conscious of his unworthiness now that he was near her than he had been when he was far from her. With all his composure and worldly training, he was scarcely equal to the occasion. He had come here to ask this girl to be his wife, and he did not know how to do it. The very unconsciousness in her sweet, restful face made his task so hard.

The tide was coming in, washing up higher and higher, every wave stealing a little nearer to them.

than the one before. At last one, bolder than the rest, crept in between the stones with soft, foamy windings, and almost touched the hem of Tracy's gray linen gown.

"It won't come any nearer than this," she said, looking down. "I have sat here day after day, listening to the soft hissing that it makes, and watching to see how high it would come gliding up. That bunch of green weed is the water-mark."

She was so happy in her surroundings, so girlishly occupied with little things, that he could not speak just then as he had meant to speak. It was a pleasure to sit here beside her in the warm summer air; but it could not last. He wanted to take her hand in his, and feel that when they rose up they should walk away together through the path of life, even unto the shore of a deeper sea.

Roche was a man who read books and thought over them. He was a man who dreamed dreams of good, and never put them into shape. His was one of those haunted lives which meet us here and there; the phantoms which hovered round him were beautiful; the visions that he saw sometimes were fairer than any of those things that he touched and handled. But he had never pursued them; it had not seemed to him that it was possible to realize one's ideals. Yet now, sitting here by Tracy's side, he began seriously to think that there might be something in a certain theory of Swedenborg's. What if the love begun on earth was the endless love-story written in the chronicles of eternity?

Just for a moment Tracy wondered why he was so utterly silent. But everything around them was so beautiful and calm, even to sublimity, that it seemed a pity to break this grand stillness with frivolous words. Perhaps this was what he was feeling, she thought. Her own heart was full of rest; there were no more doubtings and discontents, but only unspoken thanksgivings. Life was good; there were higher

thoughts that would come later on; but to-day she was contented with the whiteness of the snowy cloud that hung motionless overhead, and did not seek to look above it.

If these two spirits could ever have blended and become one, Tracy would have known what Walter's silence meant. It takes the keenest instinct of a woman to interpret the silence of a man.

She had forgotten all about those loops of pearly foam that ran up among the shingle. She was looking far out across the vast plain of blue, just dimpled by the faintest of wind-kisses, when a voice spoke very quietly by her side.

"Will you help me to begin life anew?" said Walter Roche. "You can't help me unless you will put your hand into mine, and never leave me. I will take care of you, Tracy; but you must guide me. Will you consent to this?"

She looked round at him with eyes that opened slowly and sadly; and her cheek lost the freshness that the sea-breeze had brought there. There was that in her face that chilled and troubled him, and yet she had never been so gentle and kind.

"I am so sorry," she said softly. "Oh, so very sorry. I cannot guide you, Mr. Roche; our paths lie apart. Those who walk together must have one path, you know."

"Can we not have one path?" he asked, catching at her regret as if it were a thread of hope.

"No; it is not my fault, nor yours, that we cannot. There must be even more than walking together. It is a mystical path, and it must be traversed by twain who are made one in that spiritual oneness which cannot be described in words. I am expressing myself in a very poor way," she added, with a sudden clasping of her hands. "After all, what can I say but that I am very sorry?"

"I am more than sorry," he said sadly. "You give me no hope. How can you tell that we are not

destined for each other—if, indeed, there is such a thing as destiny?"

"How can I tell?" she repeated. And there was a peculiar quality in the tone of her voice; it was clear and penetrating as the note of a sweet bell. "Don't you know that one can't *speak* of things that belong to one's spirit. It is this inability which is the cause of many blunders. Do not ask me to mystify you with enigmatical phrases! I hate them; the essence of my meaning escapes when I try to imprison it in any form. Let us talk of things that can be easily expressed—let me say plainly that I like you, and that I want you to think kindly of me always."

He understood then that he had received his answer. She had no other answer to give him. She could not help it, as she had said.

"I can have only kind thoughts of you," he said quietly. "And now I am going away. It will trouble you if I remain here."

He rose, and she held out her hand to him with a pleading, upward look, which went to his heart. There were tears gathering in her eyes.

"Don't grieve over this," he said, kindly. "I know and understand. I feel that you do not wish to pain me."

Tracy shook her head; she could not speak. Then she turned aside that he might not see her tears falling, and put up her hand to shield her face. She heard his departing footsteps on the shingle, but some minutes passed before she ventured to look up again.

He was gone. She was alone once more with the great blue sea—that ancient confidante, whose voice has helped to soothe millions of troubled hearts. The slow advance of evening seemed to deepen the intense calm; the children, tired of play, had gone to their mother; and the soft rush and whisper of the tide were the only sounds which could be heard.

At last, with a long sigh, she rose, and toiled up the beach to the little villa, where grandma was still sitting at the open window. Her heart was full of regret for the man she had just sent away, but hers was not the kind of regret that reverses a decision. Sorry as she was, she did not, for an instant, wish to call him back.

And yet, if she could have given him all that he had asked for, there would have been happy days for them both. Every one spoke well of Walter Roche; every one knew that he was upright and sincere, and that he could do a kind action quietly, and speak a kind word where it was needed. There was no reason why she should not have taken him—no reason, except that strange, undefinable reason which she had tried to express clearly, and had failed.

Tracy, in her gray linen gown, and little black lace hat, came slowly into the sitting-room, facing the two women who wished her so well. She seemed scarcely to see what was before her for a moment; and then she looked at grandma with anxious, speaking eyes. The old lady knew instinctively what had occurred. She put down her knitting, and began to straighten her cap ribbons with a nervous touch.

"He has been proposing to you, Tracy," she said. "He went down the beach to do it. And you have refused him!"

"O Tracy, you haven't been so silly as to say no?" Laura cried. "He was so nice. What can you be expecting? It will be dreadful to see you growing older, year after year, and settling down into an old maid."

"That is what you will have to see, Laura, I believe," replied the girl, smiling faintly. "And perhaps it won't really be as dreadful as it seems to you now. The prospect does not appall me in the least. But—I hate to pain and disappoint you all!" she added, with a sudden break in her sweet voice.

Laura looked at her with a glance that was half-affectionate and half-pitying.

"Of course, you can't help being unlike other women," she said. "It is no fault of yours."

"If she had been exactly like other women, she wouldn't have had so many lovers to choose from," exclaimed grandma, sharply. "A commonplace girl marries because she has only one chance, and seizes it without a moment's hesitation—as you did, Laura. But an uncommon girl gets confused by the number of her chances; that is Tracy's case."

"There were others as well as Frank——" Laura began, bridling a little. But Mrs. Taunton stopped her with decision.

"Frank is a very good fellow, my dear; and he suits you perfectly. But if you had not instantly accepted his offer, you would probably be Laura Taunton at the present hour."

Anything in the shape of a skirmish between grandma and Laura was a bit of amusement which Tracy relished keenly. Even at this moment, when she was feeling sad and sorry, the two faces before her were so well worth studying, that she looked from one to the other, and forgot her depression. Grandma glanced up, saw her involuntary smile, and frowned.

"Remember, Tracy," she said, with a tightening of her lips, "that I do not hesitate to admit the anxiety I suffer on your account. You say that the prospect of your lonely future does not appall you in the least. That is true; it does not appall you because it is untried. Solitude may seem attractive to the young, but it is terrible to the old."

"Then that is a good reason for never leaving you, grandma." Tracy went up and hung over the old lady, in her childish fashion. "You will never know the terrors of solitude if I am always with you."

Mrs. Taunton's features relaxed perceptibly. She was very much moved.

"My dear child, you must not consider me and my feelings," she answered. "Think only of your own interests. You are always first in my thoughts."

Tracy kissed her, and went upstairs to her little room which overlooked the sea. The day was ended now, and the rose and gray of evening veiled the ocean and sky. Over all brooded the universal hush which had prevailed in the morning and afternoon; nothing moved upon the face of the waters; not even a sea-bird went floating through the quiet air. She stood at the window, still as a statue, with a pale face, and drooped eyelids; and presently a sweet, grave smile touched her lips.

The memory of a voice had come to her, suddenly and softly, in the stillness. It was the voice which had spoken to her under the autumn trees at Wood-court, uttering words that would never be forgotten.

"Fear not to tread a lonely path through the world," it said. "Be more fearful of the companionship that enchains, than of the solitude that leaves you free."

She knew quite well that she was misunderstood by those two excellent women downstairs. They both took the usual matter-of-fact view of marriage; and each, in her own fashion, believed that Tracy was waiting till some great wave of emotion should sweep over her life, and carry her straight into the haven of wedlock. They thought that she was wasting her best hours in waiting for this wave. It was better, they reasoned, to marry a man who was likely to prove just a rational, respectable protector, than some one with whom you were desperately in love. Great passions, they said, do not suit with domestic and household life; and they were right.

But it was not for a great passion that Tracy was waiting. She had seen enough of the world (who has not?) to know that love's halo fades when you draw too near the head that it encircles. And it has passed into a proverb that marriage destroys

love. But what kind of love is this which cannot survive the closest of all relationships? Certainly not that kind which is the union of imperishable souls; and for that mysterious union Tracy was waiting, half-consciously, as a woman of her type must always wait.

The gray of the gloaming darkened; the horizon line was lost; and far away to the left appeared a light from the coastguard station, which shone out like a fiery star. Still she stood, gazing silently into the deepening gloom, and listening to those inner voices which had never spoken so clearly as they spoke to-night. Where had she heard or read the lines that filled her with a strange and solemn delight? She could not tell; they came to her like the remembrance of some sweet strain which she had learnt in childhood, and forgotten for a while.

“For thou art
My fulness, my own thought, my second self,
And, though a thousand ages roll’d between
My being and thine, we must together meet,
As sure as sun and moon, as earth and sea,
As voices uttered from remotest stars
That seek each other through the depths of space.”

How quickly the time had flown. There was Laura calling her at the foot of the stairs, and she ran down to join her in the sitting-room.

CHAPTER XXX.

FAREWELLS.

“Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep,
He hath awakened from the dream of life;
'Tis we who, lost in stormy visions, keep
With phantoms an unprofitable strife.”

—SHELLEY.

LIFE went on quietly and peacefully in Ferngate for another year; and then everybody in the parish made a sudden discovery. All at once they perceived that the rector had broken down.

It was a trying spring, with swift hail-storms and cutting east winds. Mrs. Taunton was kept shut up in her comfortable old house, and suffered little from the fickle weather. But the rector was less fortunate: he had no devoted grand-daughter to insist, with pretty imperiousness, that he should take care of himself. Many people were ill; and he thought only of their needs, taking no rest, neglecting his meals, forgetting everything that pertained to his own comfort. A violent cold seized him, and left him a complete wreck. His face was white and pinched; he walked with feeble steps, and had a hacking cough. The doctor said that he must go abroad.

When the day was fixed for his departure, he came to say farewell to his old friends at the Laurels. Mrs. Taunton's voice trembled when she asked about his return. There was something in his aspect which seemed to make that “coming back” a doubtful thing; yet he answered her questions with his usual placid cheerfulness. But he was, perhaps, a

little less composed when Tracy put her small hand into his, and looked up at him with tearful eyes.

"Oh, if there were no such word as good-by!" she said, almost in a whisper.

"Some day it may fall into disuse," he replied, with his gentle smile. "But not yet, my child. There is a great deal to learn and unlearn first."

Grandma did not catch his meaning. She nodded her head with rather a resigned expression.

"Yes, yes; you are quite right," she said. "Tracy has a great deal to learn and unlearn. She is overfastidious, and does not estimate good, everyday things at their right value. Time will teach her wisdom."

Mr. Lazelle looked affectionately at his favorite. He hoped that time would not change her as it had changed some whom he had known. And then, with only a few more words, he took his leave of her and went away.

The little world of Ferngate had sustained a great loss. People went on living in the same way; they gave their parties and subscribed to their charities as usual; but there was a lack of life in all that was done. The rector was gone; they missed the wise head that had planned and guided for them all, and the warm heart that had vitalized their undertakings. Surely he had borne their griefs and carried their sorrows without weariness or complaint. No one had ever spoken of him as a great man; but it is doubtful if great men are remembered as long as some of their unknown brethren. Their deeds are recorded in books, and their monuments stand in our public places; but love does not build with marble: it erects a shrine in the heart.

The news of his death came to Tracy in the summer-time. Woods and fields and hedges were full of perfume and song; the gray tower of the old church was bathed in morning sunshine. She stood at her window upstairs, looking out through a frame of ivy-

leaves across the peaceful country, and the pastures that went sloping gently up to the hills.

She had wept many tears; her sorrow was deeper than words could express; and yet a touch of wonderful rest had quieted the outcry of the heart. Never before had heaven seemed so near. But what was heaven? Was it an atmosphere created by the outflowings of her own loving soul—an atmosphere so good and sweet that holy spirits could dwell in it for a while, and minister to her?

Tracy had never thought herself good. She had high aspirations, intense longings after the best things, a great dread of any fetter that could bind her down to a grovelling earthly existence. And she had, too, that passionate love of humanity which had been the most marked trait in the rector's character. "He prayeth best who loveth best," was the motto of Mr. Lazelle's noiseless life, and it lingered in the hearts of the people who had known him.

She heard no aerial voices; saw no gleam of silver pinions, felt no touch of unseen hands. Yet, as she stood looking out upon the pleasant summer land, she was filled with an intense consciousness of immortality. Death had come to teach her that there was no death. It had changed the vague belief implanted by education into a strong and tranquil assurance. It had opened the sealed fountain of spiritual knowledge, and given her to drink of the water of life.

After the rector's departure the days glided on; the weeks lengthening out unperceived into months and years. And the years were very quiet; sun-tinted, but not glorious with the light of any great joy.

Sometimes the calm household at the Laurels got hints of the life that was lived at Woodcourt. It was neither a pleasant nor a wholesome life. Sir Alfred's temper grew worse and worse; servants were always going and coming; Lady Montjoy's face looked worn and pinched and old. The little cot-

tage on the island was neglected nowadays; no pleasure parties cared to go there, for Sir Alfred hated the spot. Yet the lake was as beautiful as ever, its great white lilies rested on the dark water; its banks were rich with long wild grasses and flowers; sunbeams and willow-branches came dipping into its bosom together. It was a deserted place: Sir Alfred's avoidance of it had given rise to a rumor that it was haunted. Had he drowned somebody there in one of his passions? The servants whispered the question to each other until they half-believed that he had. Certainly, those passions were very terrible, and Lady Montjoy had no power to calm her husband in his wild moods.

Poor Grace looked back sometimes with a regretful glance to her maiden days. Those days had been full of petty worries and discontents, it is true; but they had not been darkened by the black shadow of fear. Grace was always in fear now; she would watch the door with anxious eyes when her husband went out, not knowing if he would be sane or mad when he returned. Mrs. Endon thought that Alfred grew more like the wicked Sir Everard every day. She lived with her daughter at Woodcourt, and had two beautiful rooms of her own; but her heart was never at peace.

A little girl had been born to the Montjoys, but Sir Alfred did not want a girl, and took but very small interest in the child. Nor did he even make a pretence of caring for his wife, although he was always civil to her when other people were present. In his worst moods he had never struck her, but she could not be sure that she should always escape this last degradation. She knew that Alfred would not strike her when he was in his right mind. Brutalized as he was, the hereditary finer instincts of a gentleman lingered about him yet; but the question was how long would they linger? Grace could not

tell what was coming next, and was afraid that any change would be for the worse.

She no longer loved her husband. At first she had really cared for him as much as she could care for any one; and she had done what she could, according to her lights, to save him from self-destruction. But no man can be saved against his will; and Alfred had that dogged determination to take his own course which no friendly interference can check. His mother had given him up long ago, and had gone to share the home of another dowager in Kensington. Grace went to see her sometimes, taking the child with her; and the two were better friends than they had been soon after the marriage.

"He would have killed Tracy Taunton if he had married her," the elder lady would say confidentially. "I always said it would be better for him to marry some one he didn't particularly care for. Alfred loved like a savage. I never can understand how he comes to be a son of mine!"

These words might have stung Grace once, but now she could hear them unmoved. At rare intervals she caught a glimpse of Tracy in the High Street of the old town, and envied her look of delicate youthfulness. She divined that Walter Roche had proposed, and had been rejected; and she wondered what was the secret of the girl's mysterious power of attraction. She did not detest Tracy as Alfred's mother had done; and once when they met in a shop, and Tracy spoke, with her sweet natural kindness, to the child by Grace's side, Alfred's wife was very near wishing to have her for a friend.

As to Tracy herself she remembered her brief engagement to Alfred Montjoy as something which had happened in a dream. Six years had glided by since the day when she had gone to Woodcourt to steal water-lilies. Six years—they had brought her more lovers than fall to the lot of most women; but she was heart-whole still.

She had prospered in her quiet career as an artist; yet her progress was not as rapid as it would have been if she had devoted herself to art alone. Grandma absorbed a great deal of her time and attention. It had not escaped Tracy's notice that she had grown visibly older and more feeble since the rector's death. It was plain that she pined for the old association, and missed the friend who had known her when life was young.

"I have always been an old woman to you, Tracy," she said. "But Mr. Lazelle knew me before my youth had left me. There are only young people left now. There is nobody to whom I can say—'Do you remember?' The conversation of old men and women is made up of memories, my dear."

It cost Tracy a pang to feel that she could not go back far enough to interest grandma. But day after day, with unwearied care and patience, she devoted herself to the old woman whom she loved so well. Grandma no longer fretted because Tracy was not married. She was almost past fretting now, and it was so comfortable to be petted and waited upon that she wasted no more vain regrets on the grandson she ought to have had. Perhaps, she admitted, he might not have proved a desirable acquisition after all.

The Shaws were still living in their cottage on the borders of the common; and nothing had ever been done to amend the condition of Long Gardens. But although her children were healthy and strong, an anxiety of another kind had come to Jane and her husband.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE STORY OF WILMOT LINN.

“ ‘Tis something to a heart like mine
To think of thee as living yet;
To feel that such a light as thine
Could not in utter darkness set.”

—WHITTIER.

A SWIFT afternoon breeze was blowing into Tracy's face as she took her way to the Shaws' cottage. It was a fine day at the end of December, and the charm of the landscape lay in the pale brightness that brooded over the lonely fields and quiet hills.

Tracy, well muffled up in fur, walked quickly across the waste land, enjoying the keen air and wintry light. From the small head, set with a peculiar grace on her shoulders, down to the pretty foot that tripped over the grass, she was a little princess still. Sweet, gentle, refined, with a steady lustre shining always in her dark gray eyes, people turned to look at her as she passed them, and remembered her when she was out of sight.

Jane Shaw came to her cottage door, and watched her approach. She had got up that morning with an especial desire to see her young lady; and had been running to the door at intervals all day. As a rule, Miss Tracy always came when she was particularly wanted, and Ben had confidently affirmed that his mother would certainly see her before night-fall. And Ben was right. Jane drew a deep breath of satisfaction as she caught sight of the slim, gray figure coming quickly across the common, and held out her hands joyfully as it drew near.

Trade was slack in the sleepy old town of Fern-

gate, and there was not enough work to employ Jane's husband nowadays. He was a clever and industrious workman, who chafed at inaction and longed for a wider scope. His old master was dead; business was decreasing year after year; the boys were growing up sturdy and strong, and ready enough to be of use. Reuben Shaw was an energetic man; he wrote to an uncle of his in London, and frankly explained his position. The answer to that letter had set Reuben and Jane thinking with all their might. Uncle John had been employed for years in a large store in the City; and he and his wife had lived, as caretakers, on the premises in Cannon Street. The wife had died, and John Shaw found his loneliness unendurable. He laid the matter before his employers, and suggested that his nephew and niece from Ferngate should fill his place. Jane Shaw was a capable woman, and would take care that all was kept orderly and clean.

Reuben Shaw was summoned to London by his uncle, and had an interview with one of the partners in the firm. He came back fully prepared to undertake his new duties with a stout heart. They would have a roof over their heads, he said; and there was little doubt that as good a workman as himself would find employment in the City. Jane was glad of the decision; but it grieved her sorely to leave the old home and part with Miss Tracy.

This was the tale which was poured into Tracy's ears as she sat in Jane's little parlor. Her heart sank as she listened; it would be hard to lose Jane. But she was very girlish in some things, and could see the bright side of the picture in a moment.

"It will be splendid," she said, warmly. "Only think how good it will be for the boys to get away from a lazy life. There's too much play, and too little work for them here. Leap-frog is a delightful recreation, but I wonder that Ben doesn't find it monotonous."

"If he doesn't get tired of it, miss, I do," responded Jane; "and if it's good for his health, it's bad for his trousers. However, there won't be much leap-frogging in Cannon Street. I'm afraid the poor little soul 'll miss the country air."

Tracy's heart swelled at the thought of saying good-by to Ben—a great boy now. She could not forget the days when he had been small and dimpled, and had gone to sleep in her arms. Quite suddenly she got up to go, laying her hand on Jane's shoulder with a kind touch.

"I must get back to grandma," she said. "She is growing very old, Jane."

"Yes, Miss Tracy." Jane looked into her eyes with a sad glance which answered the unspoken thought. "I always hoped I should be with you when—when you were in need of help," she added softly.

There was a moment of silence; and then Tracy went quietly away.

She walked on quickly until she had crossed the common, then slackened her pace a little, enjoying the sense of solitude, and the quietness of the gathering twilight. It saddened her to think that Jane would soon be miles away, out of her reach. Ferngate was growing empty and dull, she thought, as she drew near the old town, and saw lights springing up here and there.

Standing still for a moment, she looked up at the great tower rising against a sky as gray. It was peaceful here; but this was not the sort of peace that comes to one who has fought a good fight. Peace, like every other great prize, must be won by labor and pain. And how would it be in Ferngate if grandma were taken away? With her would depart the motive for remaining in the dreamy old town. The reason for tranquillity would exist no more.

But the very thought of losing grandma was an

agony so keen, that she could hardly bear it. The old lady had been such a dear and loving tyrant, that Tracy's desire for freedom was stifled by her affections. An inner voice murmured that it was expedient for her that grandma should go away; but she shut her ears, and brushed the tears from her eyes.

The evening had set in quiet and chill. Only the faintest breath of wind was roaming fitfully through the leafless trees. There was a little whispering in the laurels as she passed through the paved court-yard and pulled the bell; fire-light and lamp-light glowed cheerfully through the crimson curtains of the drawing-room; Barbara, in her white apron and smart cap, opened the door with an unmoved face. Nothing had happened in Tracy's absence; if any change were near at hand, it gave no token of its approach.

"And so the Shaws are going to London," said Mrs. Taunton, sipping her tea comfortably by the fire. News was so scarce, that Tracy's little piece of intelligence was seized upon with avidity.

"Yes; they are going very soon," Tracy replied. "I don't think I have ever been to Cannon Street, grandma; but I know it is not far from St. Paul's."

"Cannon Street!" repeated the old lady, dreamily. "Let me think—yes, St. Monica's Church is there. The Vicar of St. Monica's owed everything to Mr. Lazelle. You remember the story, Tracy?"

"What story, grandma?"

"Do you mean to say that you have never heard it? After knowing Mr. Lazelle so intimately, too!"

"I only heard that a Mr. Linn, of St. Monica's, was a great friend of the rector's," Tracy answered. "That I have always known."

Grandma handed her cup to be filled; drummed upon the table thoughtfully with her mitten-ed fingers for a second or two; and then, addressing herself to nobody in particular, remarked "that it was a

strange thing that young people had no memories." "And yet," she resumed after a momentary pause, "perhaps it was not such a strange thing after all, considering the immense number of trashy novels which they read. Tracy's memory, for example, was so clogged and weighted with fiction, that it had ceased to act properly. A beautiful story of real life, a story which set forth the goodness and nobleness of a dear old friend, was forgotten as soon as heard; but an absurd and impossible romance in three volumes could be recalled at a minute's notice. It was quite sad."

"It would be quite sad, grandma, if I could forget any story which concerned Mr. Lazelle," said Tracy, moved to indignation. "He was one of the dearest friends I ever had! I have often wished that I knew more about his early life; but he hated to talk about himself."

Mrs. Taunton had made a little sensation, and she enjoyed it. And now it suddenly occurred to her that Tracy's memory might not be in fault, after all. "He hated to talk about himself," she repeated. "And he hated other people to talk about him. He was as anxious to hide his good deeds as some persons are to conceal their bad ones. But that was a lovely little story."

"Let me hear it, grandma," said Tracy, persuasively. "Wait till Barbara has taken away the tea-tray, and then begin. No one can tell a story better than you can."

There was truth in this little piece of flattery. Grandma really possessed a large share of that gift which preserved the life of the princess in the "Arabian Nights." She could not invent, but she could remember; and her remembrances were always told in fitting words. As a child, Tracy had complained that grandma could never tell any tales about fairies and witches; yet her stories of school, and the experiences of her early days, were always worth

listening to. She smiled, well pleased with the compliment, and summoned Barbara.

The tray was removed, and the door shut. Tracy stirred the fire, and brought her work-basket to the corner of the table. Mrs. Taunton's hands moved slowly in a film of white wool-work, and the gentle click of her knitting-pins filled up the pauses.

"After Mr. Lazelle left Oxford," she began; "he was appointed to the curacy of St. Monica's, and lived in lodgings in an old-fashioned square, not far from the church. I don't think there is much of that square remaining now; the houses are turned into warehouses; but in those days Mr. Lazelle lived there very comfortably, and was well cared for by his landlady. He was not an eloquent preacher; he never wrote anything—not even a tract; no one ever spoke of him as a remarkable man; but it is a fact that everybody loved him."

Grandma came to a stop, took off her spectacles, and carefully wiped them. Then she remarked that the lamp was not burning brightly; but Tracy knew what it was that made the old lady's eyes so dim.

"One dark night in November," she went on, "he had been called out to visit a dying girl, and was coming home between ten and eleven o'clock. As he was passing the door of old St. Monica's he fancied that he heard a feeble wail. It was raining, and the air was chill; but he paused, and listened, and looked about him. Huddled up, close to the door of the old church, was a shapeless bundle, that stirred a little when he went close to it. He stooped and lifted it from the damp doorstep, and found that it was a little child."

Tracy looked up, with flushed cheeks, and kindling interest in her eyes.

"Anybody but Mr. Lazelle would have taken it to the police station," grandma continued, with a suspicious quaver in her voice. "But he actually had the audacity to carry it straight home to his

landlady. Of course, he knew that Mrs. North was a motherly soul, and that she was so devoted to him that he might have brought a young dragon into the house if he had cared to do so. Still, it was a daring thing to bring home a baby. And even Mrs. North was less amiable than usual when she found what he had done."

"But she was soon appeased, wasn't she?" Tracy asked.

"Yes; you see Mr. Lazelle had a wonderful way of getting people to agree with him. After making a little noise, Mrs. North gave in and began to take an interest in the poor little thing. It turned out to be a boy of eleven or twelve months, dressed in good clothes, and quite clean. From his neck hung a small cross, studded with rubies, attached to a fine gold chain; and on the back of the cross were the initials W. L. The ornament was really of value, and at first they believed that somebody would come and claim him. Mrs. North was quite sure that he must be a nobleman's son, and was easily persuaded to take the greatest care of him."

"And did the noble father really appear?"

"Never," replied Mrs. Taunton, emphatically. "But if Mrs. North is still alive, I dare say she is expecting him to this day. Inquiries were made in all directions, without result. And then Mr. Lazelle baptized the baby, and gave him the name of Wilmot Linn; but why that name was chosen I cannot tell. The little fellow grew and flourished, as deserted children often do. He was still very young when Mr. Lazelle's sister came home widowed from India, and the curate went to live with her in Bloomsbury; but the boy remained with Mrs. North."

"If Mr. Lazelle had happened to have nephews and nieces," Tracy began.

"But he had none. And so, when he decided to send Wilmot to school first and to college afterward, there were no aggrieved relations to make a fuss.

There is very little more to tell; the lad became a clever man, and Mr. Lazelle was amply rewarded. It was a romantic thing that Wilmot Linn should rise to be vicar of St. Monica's, was it not?"

"Yes," said Tracy, thoughtfully. "It is a very pretty story, grandma. I should like to see that Mr. Linn."

Mrs. Taunton was tired, and lay back in her chair in silence. It was a wet night; out-of-doors there was a hubbub of wind and rain; Tracy listened to the weird sounds while grandma dozed; and suddenly a great dread of some coming shadow fell upon her spirit. She had never felt so utterly alone as she did at this moment, sitting by the cheerful fireside. What would she not have given to have heard the rector's kindly voice again?

The rain was still thick against the pane when grandma opened her eyes and sat upright, feeling refreshed by her short nap. Her gaze rested on Tracy's grave face, and she took up her knitting again with a sigh.

"This is too dull a life for you, child," she said, after a pause. "I am getting old, and you think that I do not notice your fits of depression."

Tracy shook off her gravity at once, declaring that she preferred her quiet home to the turmoil of society. But it was true, she admitted, that grandma's story had revived her sorrow for the friend who was no longer with them.

"We did not realize how well we loved him," said Mrs. Taunton, bending over her knitting. "Ah, these friendships! They are the lamps that light up our path; but they go out one by one. It is only the stars that shine on."

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN EMPTY HOUSE.

"If e'en when faith had fall'n asleep,
I heard a voice, 'Believe no more!'
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled in the Godless deep;

A warmth within the breast would melt
The freezing reason's colder part,
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answered, 'I have felt.'"

—IN MEMORIAM.

ALL the windows in the old house were set wide open, that the sweet air of early summer might wander in. Outside, one or two heavy wagons went creaking along, laden with fragrant hay and decked with flowers. Blackbirds were singing in the garden; wafts of wind-scattered blossoms strewed the floor of the breakfast-room, and a yellow butterfly fluttered in and lighted upon the back of grandma's empty chair.

The door opened, and Tracy, looking very pale and fragile in her black gown, came in. Then she stood quite still, looking at the old chair, and taking note of every indentation on the worn cushions. On the little table near stood grandma's work-basket, containing her knitting, and she lifted the lid. The dear old hands had stopped in the middle of a row, and the work was rolled neatly round the pins.

The sight of that unfinished row was more than the desolate woman, just then, could bear. Nothing, perhaps, makes it so hard to believe in the doctrine of immortality as these relics of an ended earthly

life. They speak to us mutely of the close of all human labor and companionship; trifles as they are, they help to build up that terrible wall of doubt against which we hurl ourselves in vain. Sobbing there, in her great anguish, she asked herself if life were only a play, in which we pretended to have souls, and entertained ourselves and each other with fine speeches about an eternal meeting-place.

The birds sang on in the garden; the butterfly took sudden flight out of the silent room, and flitted away into the sunshine. Tracy, spent with weeping, sank down into the chair near the open window, and closed her aching eyes. The summer wind smote her softly, stirring her hair, and scattering a few rosy petals over her black gown.

There was no voice, nor was there any sign of a spiritual presence near; yet the old faith came back, slowly and calmly, to the much-tried heart. Nothing was explained; the silence was as deep as ever; but, just for an instant, Tracy was "taken out of time." The temporal dooms us to suffer because it hides the eternal. But sometimes the divine thing within us finds a chink in its fleshly prison, and sees the light.

She could even bear the sight of the knitting when she got up again. It was just a type of that poor earthly labor which may, without pain, be left unfinished, because the worker has done all which is required of him. Done it badly, perhaps, with dropped stitches now and then, but still accomplishing a fragment of the perfect pattern that was in his mind.

A sudden impulse moved Tracy to sit down once more in the sweet air and sunshine, and finish that uncompleted row. She worked at it diligently and calmly till it was done, and then reflected that it was in that fashion that a great deal of the most important work in this world is performed. The lover of humanity designs a scheme for the good of his

fellows, and dies before it is half carried out. The thinker has a great thought, and expires when it is but half expressed. All earth-life is only a continuation; a new pair of hands is always found to take up what the old pair has laid down.

Is it not well that the dead always leave us something to finish for them? Just at first, perhaps, we may not be able to find that unfinished work which they have left for our hands. But we shall find it, sooner or later; and in carrying on their labor we shall find our peace.

"Why are you looking so eagerly for the postman, Tracy?" asked Laura, as they sat together two days afterward.

"I am so sick of the sight of condolences that I hope he won't bring any more."

She wiped her eyes as she spoke. Laura's heart was kind; but in times of sickness or sorrow she was of very little use. Her nerves always gave way under the slightest strain. She was longing to get out of this silent house, and back to her own cheerful cottage where her husband was left in charge.

"I am expecting a letter from Jane Shaw," Tracy answered. "I asked her to do something for me."

"Jane Shaw? Oh, yes; I remember that she went to live in London. But what can she do for you, Tracy?"

"She can look about for suitable lodgings. No one understands my requirements better than Jane."

"There is no need to look for lodgings yet," said Laura. "You are coming to stay with us for the summer. It would kill you to hurry up to London before you have had some rest."

"But I want to feel that there is a place waiting for me up there. And it must be an inexpensive place, Laura. You know that I am poor."

"It is a pity that dear grandma did not leave more money," said Mrs. Dawley, with a sigh. "And we are very badly provided with relations; no one

connected with us is worth a sou. Frank has a rich uncle, and two well-to-do aunts; but they evidently mean to go on living."

"O Laura," said Tracy, with a melancholy little laugh; "don't you want them to go on living?"

"Yes, dear, of course I do; and I should wish it still more if they would give us two hundred a year. It is a pity that people should not do a kindness till after they are dead."

The expected letter arrived that day. Jane Shaw was comfortably settled in her new home; and her husband and the boys were doing well. The head clerk, who occupied rooms in the upper part of the premises, was to be married in the autumn, and his quarters would be vacant. Jane suggested that Miss Tracy might be accommodated there till a better place was found. She would then be able to wait upon her dear young lady as she had done in days gone by, and perhaps it would seem like a home.

Laura declared that it would not seem in the least like a home. None but clerks and caretakers ever lived in the City; and they mostly died for lack of air. Her profound knowledge of the City and its ways undoubtedly made her opinion valuable, said Tracy.

The farewell day at the Laurels came at last. Laura had no good-byes to say; and Tracy went through the old house alone.

She lingered longest in her studio, stripped now of the best of its decorations. All her pictures, and one or two small articles of furniture, had been packed up, and sent to Jane Shaw, in London; there was a vacant space on the wall where the engraving of the dying knight had been. Memories of summers flown came back as she stood at the ivy-framed window; dreams of old dreams, thoughts of old thoughts, were thronging into her mind. We have all known such leave-takings; and although we have, perhaps, learned to take life as we find it, there is an inexpressible anguish in these parting hours.

It was well for Tracy that she dared not linger long. Laura was waiting impatiently downstairs, anxious to get back to her husband and children, and afraid of losing her train. Mrs. Dawley and her sister did not quarrel nowadays; but if ever two grown-up people, so differently organized as these, are thrown into intimate relations, it follows, from the very laws of their existence, that one must pain the other.

They were off at last. Tracy looked from the carriage window upon the shifting landscape, but noticed nothing; all seemed a blank. She was thoroughly weary when they arrived at Laura's country home; and Frank came out to welcome her with his two daughters. The girls were affectionate and kind; but they wondered that Aunt Tracy was so utterly broken down. In them grandma had never inspired a deep affection. She had simply appeared to them as an imperious old lady with a genius for setting other people down.

The summer passed in a quietness, which was only external, so far as Tracy was concerned. She drank in new strength with the pure air, and took daily rambles with her nieces. Marian and Kate delighted in this new companionship, and were never tired of watching Tracy, as she bent over her painting, or of listening while she talked with her old quaint playfulness. They did not know that she was restless at heart. Her manner was always full of pleasantness and peace.

The sultry days came to a close; the woods turned russet and red; the swallows took their departure. Tracy packed her boxes, and said good-by to her relations with kisses and tears.

"Don't forget us all in the turmoil of London," said Mrs. Dawley, wiping her eyes. "And oh, Tracy, be sure that your stockings are darned, and your buttons securely sewn on!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ALL SAINTS.

“One feast, of holy days the crest,
I, though no churchman, love to keep,
All Saints,—the unknown good that rest
In God’s still memory folded deep;
The bravely dumb that did their deed,
And scorned to blot it with a name,
Men of the plain heroic breed,
That loved Heaven’s silence more than fame.”

—LOWELL.

TRACY woke up one morning with a bewildering consciousness that she was in an unfamiliar room, and that she had, somehow, got into a new world. The light of a London day was stealing in through her window; but, although it was the first of November, there was no fog. She drew up the blind, and looked across Cannon Street to the great railway station, teeming with busy life. Above all was a peaceful autumn sky, with white clouds floating as tranquilly in the blue as if they sailed over dewy pastures instead of this tumultuous city. Was it the whiteness of these clouds that made her think suddenly of the vision of those who were clothed in white robes, and had palms in their hands? Perhaps it was; for then she remembered all at once that this was All Saints’ day.

She had arrived in town on the preceding evening, as weary and worn as a traveller could be. Jane Shaw had given her a quiet welcome, ministered to her needs, and led her to her room. Thinking that she should certainly lie awake all night she fell

asleep unawares, and slumbered soundly till morning.

That peaceful night restored her strength, and gave her fresh courage to face her new life. The first thing to be done was to examine her rooms, which were both on the same floor, high up, and nearly at the top of the large premises occupied by Messrs. Goodman & Steele.

This great house of business was situated at the corner of Budge Lane, and customers and messengers were rushing in and out of its doors all day. But while there was an endless bustle going on below, an unbroken calm reigned above. The traffic of London thundered and roared round the basement; but the light flowed in peacefully through Tracy's windows, and in her airy room there was an atmosphere of cheerfulness and repose. Jane had arranged all her young lady's belongings with care and skill, and had added the few simple articles of furniture that were required. A certain instinct had taught her just where to place the engraving of the knight. He had always been Miss Tracy's friend in her childish days: Jane remembered the little figure with dark hair flowing, and slender hands clasped, pacing slowly in front of that picture. And she knew that the woman would come and look at it with the grave deep eyes of the dreamy child.

There are rooms in which we feel instinctively that we shall not tarry long. They are mere halting-places on the life-journey; spots that we do not care to revisit, and we take leave of them without one regretful thought. But there are other rooms which welcome us with mute familiarity. We know not why the atmosphere in them is pleasant to us, but we have a strange fancy that some dear spirit has been here before, and has prepared the place for us; and, feeling this, we do not want to go away.

It was this sense of dearness which came to Tracy when she stood for the first time in her new sitting-

room. The two windows overlooking the street were set open, and the morning light shone softly on the pictures and books that she loved. As she stood here, in a bright loneliness, the clouds seemed to roll away from her life, and leave the path clear and plain. She had done well to come to this place. It was the right place to live in, and work in; aye, and to suffer in when the day of sorrow came again. A trouble is always harder to bear if it comes to us in an uncongenial spot; and a joy is all the sweeter if it finds us in some haven where we love to be.

After breakfast, and a little talk with Jane, Tracy went forth into the noisy world out-of-doors. Rested and refreshed as she was, her nerves were strong enough to bear this turmoil; she mingled with the ever-rushing tide of humanity, and felt neither bewilderment nor weariness. Presently the sound of a bell came chiming above the din, and she looked up to find herself close to the door of St. Monica's.

Suddenly, as in a flash, she remembered the romantic story of Wilmot Linn. It was here, on these timeworn steps, that Mr. Lazelle had found the deserted child. She pushed the door open softly and went in.

Into the dim interior of this old city church the autumn sunbeams brought only a misty light. Here and there the gilding caught a gleam and shone out of the shadows, and the rich windows burned with a sombre glow. Lights, like clusters of stars, were set in the semi-darkness, only half-revealing the silent crowd that filled the place. The bell ceased; the mellow notes of the organ pealed forth solemnly and sweetly, and the choristers filed in. Tracy thought of grandma and the rector as she knelt down with the rest.

Afterward, when the preacher went up into the old carven pulpit, she knew by instinct that this was Wilmot Linn—knew it, although she had never heard any description of the man who stood there,

tall and calm, glancing down for an instant at the sea of upturned faces below.

At first that calmness of his seemed to Tracy to be almost akin to coldness. The light was dim; but as she looked up at the pale, proud face, she thought regretfully of the fatherly aspect of the good old rector at home. He was an ascetic, this Wilmot Linn; he lived an austere life, and would be too prone, she fancied, to condemn those who could not follow him along the thorny way. He was going to preach to them about All Saints; and his notion of a saint would be sure to deter any one from wishing to become one. Yet, half-reluctantly, she prepared herself to listen with close attention.

And it was not difficult to listen with the rest as he went on. It was of the two great festivals, celebrated that week in all Christendom, that he was speaking—the festivals of All Souls and All Saints. He reminded them that about the middle of the ninth century Gregory IV. appointed the first of November as the feast of All Saints, a day of sacred remembrance of all the saints of every time, of every land, of every creed; a day on which the war of theology should cease, and the bitterness of controversy subside—a very truce of God. But the feast of All Souls was founded in the eleventh century as a day to commemorate all the departed—not the wise and great only, not the holy and happy only, but all who are removed from this visible sphere of life. All Saints is the day of church brotherhood; but All Souls is the day of human brotherhood.

“No true estimate of human life is possible, if we lose touch of the sublime truth,” said Wilmot Linn, with a thrill of passion trembling through his sweet voice. “May we ever be spared the cruel and partial judgments of men who would seek to be wiser than God! When we look at the world from any other standpoint, we are tempted to despise and

undervalue it. The Pharisee is thankful that he is not as other men are; the reformer is impatient with the slow march of human progress; everything discourages us except the Word of God and the Gospel of Christ. Only those have the true sight who can look through the masks and disguises of human lives, and behold the invisible souls within. Some preachers have told me that I should preach as a dying man to dying men. But I prefer to preach as a living man to living men, united by Christ to an ever-living God, seeking God through the yearning of the soul's eternal need.

“One prayer soars cleansed with martyr fire,
One choked with sinner’s tears,
In heaven both meet in one desire,
And God one music hears.”

“If we feel truly that all souls are His, we can go on working for each other, suffering for each other, and not be discouraged by ingratitude or unrequital. It is this which sanctifies the labors of all our physicians and philanthropists. They approach humanity with the profound belief that beneath the stains of hereditary disease and sin, there are the lineaments of the Divine.”

There was an instant’s pause, and then the sweet voice rose again in a strain of intense tenderness. Tracy quivered, and tears gathered in her eyes.

“Let us remember to-day the nameless souls who have done their Master’s bidding noiselessly here on earth. We reap a rich harvest sown by unknown hands; we revel in the sweetness of a freedom which great hearts broke for, and won for us. All around us, working in this present world, there are quiet men and women opening up new pathways for their fellow-men to tread. They lived not in the past alone; at this very hour they are gliding through the crowds in our busy streets outside that door. We pass them daily, knowing nothing of those errands of mercy on which they are bound.

Like the dew and the sunshine they work in silence, leaving sweet traces to show where they have been. They ask for no reward; there will be no monument left behind them; they are content if they can leave the world a little better than they found it. Let us think of these unknown saints 'whom having not seen we love.' Let us seek their spiritual companionship; let us learn of Him with whom they hold communion, that we, with them, may be partakers of His heavenly kingdom. It is such saints as these who do His will on earth even as it is done in heaven."

Tracy no longer complained to herself of the coldness of Wilmot Linn. She knew him better now, and understood the influence which penetrated her heart and the hearts of all these people who had turned aside from their business to listen to his words. She went out of the church into the sunshine with a longing to join the brotherhood of silent workers. Was it for this that the course of her life had been changed, and the hands, lately fettered, set free?

She returned to her room to finish the business of unpacking; and the rest of the day was spent in setting things in order. Yet she found time to ask Jane Shaw a few questions.

"Yes, miss; Mr. Linn is everybody's friend," Jane answered. "He's got some of the ways of our old rector, as you'll find when you know him. But he works harder than the rector ever did, and he don't spare himself in the least. Before he came to St. Monica's, folks said that it might as well have been shut up; it was that ridiculously empty, miss, that it was a waste of prayers and sermons to have them there!"

Tracy laughed. But Jane did not mind being laughed at.

"They say that he wanted to do something for the parish where he was picked up," she continued.

"But he's not one of those who only care for one sort of good, and he isn't satisfied with just filling the empty church. Years and years ago, miss, in those History of England days that you used to tell me about, there was a school for desolate children, attached, as they call it, to St. Monica's. There's a little of it left now, but, when Mr. Linn came, it was just a-dwindling and a-fading away. And he's a-trying to build it up, and make it a bigger thing than it ever was before. Why, miss, those who live with him in that gloomy house behind the church, are just as friendless as he was! He's got the notion, you see, that as his life was saved and preserved in such a remarkable manner, he ought to spend it for others. That's how it is with him."

Jane's words always flowed fast in her rare moments of excitement; and, in such moments, she always reverted to the rustic mode of expressing herself. Tracy liked to see her cheeks flush, and to hear her say "a-dwindling and a-fading."

Two days came and went, and the rooms were in such perfect order that it seemed to Jane as if Miss Tracy had been living in them for years. It is true that Tracy's "order" meant a certain kind of artistic "disorder;" things were not in pairs and sets; colors were varied, although they never clashed; fancies found expression in unexpected bits of drapery. She worked vigorously, securing the brief morning light, and throwing all her heart into her labor.

On Saturday afternoon she went up the slope of the busy street, and paused beside the door of the old church. A woman was selling violets there; she bought a little bunch, and stood listening to the sound of the organ, half inclined to go in.

Suddenly, with a quick movement, the church door was pushed open, and a young woman came out, carrying a music-book under her arm. She was so short that Tracy could hardly decide for a moment whether she were a woman or an old-looking child.

A second glance made it evident that she was a person of four or five-and-twenty, painfully deformed, and wearing a long cloak to hide the defect. When Tracy, with ready and instinctive courtesy, stepped aside to let her pass, she was rewarded with a look of such intense malignity that she almost started.

The girl's face was startlingly red and white—so red and white that she had the complexion of a doll, rather than of a human being. The mouth was coarse; the eyes, pale gray, gleamed under yellow fringes; and the hair was of that glittering red-gold which some artists love to paint. It was abundant, and lay in thick coils under the shabby black hat which she wore. A feeling, half of pity, half of aversion, took possession of Tracy, as the stunted figure swept past her, and disappeared in the narrow passage beside the church.

"I feel as if I had seen a bad fairy," she thought, holding her violets up to her face. "There is something uncanny-looking about that poor creature."

The organ music burst forth again, full and sweet. The "bad fairy" had vanished; Tracy went in, and sat down in the gathering shadows to listen. The strain was tender and quiet in the beginning; then a little sad; finally it rose into a triumphant melody that buoyed up the heart. She shut her eyes, and did not open them again till the last notes had died away.

When she rose from her dark corner the player had closed the organ, and was coming down the aisle. They met at the door, and she saw that he was a young man, tall and slender, with a beautiful Greek face, very pure in outline, and large blue eyes, as clear and candid as a child's. It was a face that gave one the idea of a gentle, impressible nature; a little weak and womanish, perhaps, but full of happy promises; sensitive, refined, and bright with that radiance which comes to those who are free to use a great gift. This was Pascoe Rayne, a lad whom

Wilmot Linn had taken out of poverty and obscurity, and trained to fill the post of organist at St. Monica's.

He opened the door for Tracy to pass out, and returned her glance with a look so gentle and modest that she was encouraged to speak. "Your beautiful music has refreshed me," she said as she passed him. "I thank you."

His face brightened visibly at the kind words. For a moment he paused on the old steps, and stood looking eagerly after her graceful figure till it vanished in the crowd.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BITTER AND SWEET.

“Never happy any more!
Is it not but a sorry lore
That says, ‘Take strength, the worst is o’er’ ?”

—D. G. ROSSETTI.

PASCOE RAYNE did not return at once to the clergy house; he crossed the street, turned down Dowgate Hill, and, entering a dark doorway, went up a still darker staircase. Then he knocked at a closed door, and was answered by a shrill voice, telling him to come in.

In a dull little room, containing a piano, a table, two chairs, and a very small bed, sat the deformed girl who had attracted Tracy’s attention. She was sitting at the table, near the window, apparently gazing out into the twilight; but at the young man’s entrance she rose, and lighted a gas-burner, looking at him with a swift, inquisitive glance.

“Here is the anthem you wanted, Marget,” he said, handing her a roll of music.

“Ah, I left it behind this afternoon,” she answered. “Pascoe, did you see that stranger—a lady—coming into the church? People are intrusive.”

“I saw her as I came out,” he replied. “She had been listening while I played. There was no intrusiveness, Marget: the church is open to all.”

“But we have too many people coming and going about us,” said the girl irritably. She took a pencil from the table, and twisted it rapidly in her thin fingers; and he could hear her beating one foot upon the floor.

"What harm do they do?" he asked. "How you excite yourself about trifles!"

"These are no trifles." The pencil was twisted faster. "Little things are the beginning of great things. I know who that woman is."

"How do you know her, Marget?" Pascoe spoke with newly awakened interest.

"Ben Shaw has been talking to the other boys about his mother's young lady—a Miss Taunton. She has come to live here. What an absurd place for a lady to live in! And she was the friend of Mr. Lazelle. Of course she will think that she has a right to be running in and out of our church, and always interfering."

"She won't interfere," said Pascoe, with an air of conviction; "but I hope she'll come very often. She spoke to me this afternoon, and she has the sweetest voice I ever heard in my life."

Marget began to pace up and down her small room, gesticulating violently, and Pascoe watched her with a look of deep pain in his clear blue eyes. She was his only sister, this poor passionate creature, who was so sadly grotesque in her angry moments; and it had always been impossible for her to realize the mournful fact that her deformity set her apart from happier women. She rejected vehemently the least suggestion that she was one whit behind the most perfectly formed of her sex. And as she walked to and fro, her red-gold hair glittering in the gaslight, and a flush of bright carmine burning on her white cheeks, it seemed almost cruel of nature to have decked with such gaudy coloring a being so misshapen.

"You are so stupid, Pascoe, that every one pleases you," she said viciously. "I suppose she paid you a compliment, and that was enough to make you think her lovely. But she isn't lovely at all—a poor colorless thing: no man would look at her twice."

"Do sit down, Marget," her brother entreated. "It is quite dreadful to see you working yourself into a passion. And you are altogether wrong," he continued, with some heat. "Any one would want to look twice at the lady in black. I am not such a fool as you imagine. Of course, I can't tell if she is really the Miss Taunton that Ben talked about, but——"

"It is quite decided that I hate her, no matter what her name is," interrupted Marget furiously. "I tell you, Pascoe, that you are an idiot: one smile enchanting you. Has she got such a complexion as mine? Do you think I would change my hair for hers, which is as black and curly as a negro's? Why, the vicar himself said one morning to Mrs. Deale—'Marget looks as fresh as a rose.' *As fresh as a rose*, those were his very words. Did a man ever make a prettier speech about a woman? Would any man have said such a thing if he had not admired a woman?"

"Oh, Marget!" poor Pascoe almost groaned.

"I dare say you are surprised." She laughed and tossed her head and its golden crown with the air of an acknowledged beauty. "Brothers never can appreciate their sisters. But he *did* say so."

"Yes, Marget, but he said so because he was glad to see that you had become so well and strong. The words don't imply admiration. You had been ill, and you had recovered your fresh looks."

She moved impatiently. "Pascoe, you won't see, and you won't understand," she said, still stubbornly insisting on her right to be admired. "But you can't deny he has often praised my playing."

"I don't wish to deny that, Marget. You do play very well, dear; and the vicar takes pleasure in your progress. I am proud of my pupil," he added kindly.

"You are a good fellow, Pascoe. You have taken great pains with me. I have not your genius,

I know; but I am a very persevering girl, and I mean to get on."

"You will get on," Pascoe answered. "Devote yourself to music; give your whole heart to it; think of nothing else."

He stooped and kissed her tenderly, and then went down the narrow stairs and into the lighted street.

He was still a very young man, younger than Marget, and tears stood in his eyes as he thought of his poor little sister. How could he ever be angry with her—even for a moment? he asked himself, with bitter self-reproach. She was not as other girls, to whom God had given perfect symmetry of form. Was it not possible that a vague consciousness of deformity was concealed deep down under fierce pretensions to admiration?

Marget and Pascoe Rayne were the son and daughter of a small shopkeeper who had failed in business, and had come to be a caretaker in some premises near the Mansion House. Wilmot Linn had found out that Pascoe possessed great musical talent, and had spared no pains to cultivate the gift. Having obtained a good appointment for his own organist, he gave the vacant post to Pascoe; and the young fellow repaid him with a devotion which never wavered. When poor old Rayne, feeble and heart-broken, went quietly to rest, Pascoe was able to help his sister; and the two were numbered among the children of St. Monica's.

It was of all Mr. Linn's unselfish kindness that Pascoe was thinking as he went up the flagged path to the clergy-house. Now, for the first time, it had struck him that poor Marget, with her intense vanity and jealousy, was likely, perhaps, to be a trouble to the good friend who had helped them in their poverty. Any living creature who was down-trodden or afflicted was sure of winning sympathy and tenderness from Wilmot Linn.

Mr. Linn had the rich nature which gives liber-

ally, filling empty cups with the sweet, strong wine of its own charity. But what if, at the bottom of a certain cup, there happened to be a single drop of poison which would mingle with the reviving draught?

As this thought flashed into Pascoe's mind he shuddered with a new and strange apprehension. His hand trembled slightly as he opened the inner door. But Mrs. Deale's rosy face looked cheerfully out of her warm little sanctum on the left side of the entry, and greeted him with a smile.

"Oh, that's you, Mr. Rayne," she said. "It's ten minutes past five, and the vicar hasn't come in to tea. Walker's boy has been asking for him again; but Mr. Abbott was here, and he went to Walker."

"That is as it should be," remarked Pascoe, hanging up his hat. "It is not fair to let the vicar always go there; and Walker isn't as ill as he thinks himself; the doctor told me that he would be up again before Christmas."

"I never did think much of Walker," said the housekeeper confidentially; "but Mr. Fordyce is that absent-minded that he'll empty the tea-pot, if you don't make haste and take your share, Mr. Rayne."

Fordyce, the junior curate, was justifying Mrs. Deale's suspicion at that moment. He sat at the table with an open book beside his cup, and had mechanically stretched out a long arm toward the tea-pot, when Pascoe whisked it away. The bony fingers grasped at nothing, and Fordyce looked up through his spectacles in mild surprise.

"It's a bad habit, reading at meal-times," said Pascoe, laughing. "Don't you see that it leads to greediness? I believe you have had as much tea as is good for you."

"I dare say I have," admitted Fordyce meekly. "I wonder how many times I've filled my cup since Abbott went out? He would have checked me if he

had been here. And the fire is getting low, I declare!"

He got up to put on more coal, insisting that Pascoe should sit down to the table at once. Young Rayne sank into his usual seat with a sense of weariness; the scene with Marget had exhausted him; he was not strong, and he felt grateful for the warmth and comfort and peace which he always found awaiting him here.

The curate's room, which was opposite to Mrs. Deale's little parlor, was provided with an inviting sofa as well as three easy-chairs, and was as cosy a retreat on a winter evening as the heart of man could desire. The walls were lined with well-filled bookshelves; the firelight and gaslight shone on one or two charming engravings; the tea-service was gay and bright. In one corner was a piano, on which Pascoe often played to his two friends in their moments of leisure. The young fellow was a favorite with them both; they sympathized with the passionate love of music which dominated his whole life; they were attracted by his sweet nature, and the personal beauty which made him remarkable. Pascoe's childhood had been troubled and sad. He had been the despair of his father, who could see nothing but starvation for the dreamy, delicate boy. But now all his hopes were realized; Wilmot Linn had come like a good angel to lift him out of the mire and clay of life, and crown his heart's desire.

It was twenty-five minutes past five when Mrs. Deale, always fussy and anxious about her master, heard the vicar's step at last. He went up the dark staircase to his study, and she followed with his tea-tray.

He had thrown himself into a chair by the fire, and was gazing intently at the blazing coals. It struck the housekeeper, who had fallen into the habit of studying him, that his thoughts had wandered off

on a long excursion into dreamland, and could only be recalled by a strong effort of will.

"Mr. Abbott has gone to see Walker, sir," she said; "and Jones called to say that he would be here at a quarter to six—not at six, as was first arranged."

"Jones?" repeated the vicar slowly; "I thought he was not coming till Friday?"

"To-day *is* Friday, sir," said Mrs. Deale, with gentle decision.

There was an instant's pause. Mr. Linn's face had not changed in the least, and yet the housekeeper knew that his mistake had slightly ruffled him. But he only said, "Show Jones up as soon as he comes," and turned to his tea.

The good woman retired, shutting the door quietly behind her. And then Wilmot Linn rose suddenly, went to the piano, and played a few bars of a Scotch song. Returning to his seat at the table, he pushed back his dark hair with an impatient gesture, and began to read the letters which had come while he was out. Presently the door opened again, and Pascoe looked in. At the sight of the lad's beautiful face the vicar smiled.

"Are you tired?" the young man asked gently. "You came in late this afternoon, and it has been a chilly day."

"I have not felt the cold," Wilmot answered. "No, Pascoe, I am not tired; but when a man has been talking over by-gone days, he is apt to feel himself growing old. I have been speaking of the past and of Mr. Lazelle. He knew Miss Taunton from her childhood."

"Then you have seen Miss Taunton?" said Pascoe.

"Yes; she told me that she strayed into the church this afternoon, attracted by your playing. She has taken up her abode for the present at Goodman & Steele's, and has made quite a charming studio, high up above the street. The room was sweet with

violets, and full of pretty things: one does not often light on such a dainty bower in the heart of the city."

"And the lady? I had only a brief glimpse of her, but I confess she charmed me," Pascoe said with his boyish frankness.

"She has charmed me, too."

The words came very slowly from the lips that had seldom made such an admission. It was a sentence that might mean nothing, but the voice was so quiet and intense that it went straight to Pascoe's heart, and thrilled him. He looked earnestly at the man whom he loved and reverenced more than any other being in the world, and saw a new and thoughtful sweetness in his face. Could it be that Wilmot Linn, the devoted worker, the priest whose life was a life of self-denial, had at last abandoned himself to a delicious dream?

But when Jones arrived with a list of small parochial grievances, Mr. Linn was as composed and clear-headed as usual.

The week ended, Sunday came, and Tracy's face was seen among the worshippers of St. Monica's. Seven days went by without bringing anything unusual; and yet Pascoe, against his own will, found himself instinctively assuming an attitude of expectation. It seemed to him that something was in the air, although there was neither word nor sign to hint of coming changes. At last, when Saturday evening came round again, he went upstairs to the study, and paused, arrested at the door by a breath of sweet and subtle perfume.

The vicar stood leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, and in a glass vase, close to his arm, there was a bunch of violets.

It was not the first time that Pascoe had seen flowers in the study; sometimes, the children of the parish had sent their simple offerings. But about this little bouquet there was something rather remarkable. The violets were loosely tied with violet rib-

bon, and the ends of the ribbon hung over the brim of the vase. And Pascoe distinctly remembered that he had seen Miss Taunton, that very morning, with her usual black costume relieved by the knot of ribbon and the purple flowers.

They had met as old friends, these two, drawn together by their mutual love for one who was gone. The young organist had seen little of the world, but he had the true poet's insight into the deepest things of life; and he understood that a rare man and a rare woman had come together. He recalled Tracy's face, as he had seen it that very day; the pale, calm face which grew divine in an instant when she smiled or spoke.

Then he glanced at Wilmot Linn, and saw again that tender, musing look which gave a new aspect to his features. Perhaps, as he stood gazing into the fire he was really looking away into the vista of a fresh and possible life. His own life, for many years, had been a ceaseless outgiving; so much vitality had gone out of him into other lives that it was no marvel if he was often weary and worn. And now, in a sudden flash, Pascoe seemed to catch a glimpse of what might be in store for Mr. Linn if an individuality, rich and beautiful as his own, could be so blent with his that it should become a part of himself.

On Sunday afternoon this vision of a possible future still haunted Pascoe as he took his way to Marget's lodging. He felt almost afraid to face his sister with such thoughts as these hidden in his heart. He dreaded Marget's piercing gaze and searching questions. But he could not neglect her; she had no one to love her save this brother, whose path through life was so much fairer than her own. Pascoe was painfully conscious that poor Marget did not possess the power of winning love.

He found her sitting at the window in her old moody attitude. But when he entered, she turned her head sharply to look at him.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "I was wondering if you would come!"

"Wondering?" he repeated. "Do I not always come on Sunday afternoon, Marget?"

She gave him a swift glance from beneath her golden eyelashes, and he was vexed to feel that his face grew hotter under her scrutiny.

"Yes," she returned, "you always come. But the world is changing. Have you brought any news?"

"No news at all," he answered in a matter-of-fact tone. "I want to find a new boy," he added, as if he had no thoughts for anything beyond the choir. "Tom Hardy's voice is breaking. I can't expect that it will last much longer."

"I don't want to hear about Tom Hardy," she said pettishly. "Are there any changes at the clergy-house?"

"No," he replied, "things seem to be going on as usual."

Again she raised her eyes suddenly to his.

"Pascoe," she said, "I am not well. I'm restless, and nervous, and morbid. I feel as if dreadful things were going to happen."

"Oh, there's nothing serious in those feelings," he rejoined, trying to appear unconcerned. "November is a gloomy month, you know; we shall have the fog upon us presently, and its shadow is hovering over us, I suppose."

She leaned forward a little, and laid her thin, clenched hand upon her knee.

"There has been no fog," she said. "We have had the sun. But in all my life I have never known such a fearful feeling as I had to-day. I've been angry sometimes, but never so awfully enraged as I was this afternoon. Do you want to know what I saw?"

"Dear Marget, I am afraid you exaggerate trifles," he answered faintly.

"Trifles may cause horrible anguish," she went

on. "I will tell you what I saw. I watched the vicar walking slowly with that pale woman in black, walking slowly, slowly, and speaking ever so quietly. And she answered him with her eyes, and the sunshine was on both their faces. And they looked up high to the cross on St. Paul's, and that, too, was shining in the sun. I tell you, Pascoe, that I have never seen him look as he looked then. And something rose within me that made me gasp for breath, I was so full of rage and hate."

"Marget," he said earnestly, "there was nothing remarkable in all that you saw. She is a stranger, and Mr. Linn is always courteous and kind. But I fear for you when you suffer yourself to be overcome. If you long for something which you cannot have, you ought to take the denial patiently. The worst kind of pain comes from passionate rebellion; and the sooner one learns that, the better for one's peace."

"You did not see them, Pascoe." She ignored his last words. "If you had watched them as I did——"

"Do not watch any more," he entreated. "You will only torture yourself. O Marget, the sharpest suffering you can have to bear will not last you very long! Try to be patient."

"I could never bear *that!*!" she cried. "Never, never, never!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

RECOGNITION.

“Beloved, in the noisy city here,
The thought of thee can make all turmoil cease;
Around my spirit, folds thy spirit clear
Its still soft arms, and circles it with peace.”

—LOWELL.

THE autumn brought with it a sickness which seemed to fasten especially upon the young. The children of St. Monica’s fell victims one after another to this subtle fever-fiend; and Wilmot Linn was at work among them day and night. The constant visiting and anxiety told upon him severely; his strength, long overtaxed, was not equal to this new strain. Moreover, Christmas was close upon him with all its claims; and sometimes, in the solitude of his own room, he would ask himself wonderingly how long his powers would hold out?

Ben Shaw was on the sick-list, but his sound constitution struggled against the disease, and he did not suffer as others did. Tracy, in her lofty bower, seemed to be lifted above the reach of ills; but she was ready and willing to be the helper of everybody. If Jane Shaw had not sternly guarded her, she would have gone from house to house, visiting the patients; but Jane was firm, and refused to let her wear out her newly acquired vigor.

“There’s work for you to do in your studio, Miss Tracy,” she said. “Your place is there, and it’s a comfort to see you in it.”

It was a comfort to Wilmot Linn to see her there.

When he came to visit Ben he never failed to rest himself in the studio. However dark the outside world might be, there was always light in this room, light, and fragrance, and warm colors; and a woman's presence hovering, like the scent of her violets, over every trifle. Gradually, the ordinary conventional restraints were melting away from between them; and on a certain Saturday, when he was more than usually spent, he did not try to conceal his exhaustion.

"You are ill," Tracy said, with a thrill of pain in her soft voice.

He had sunk into a deep arm-chair near one of the windows, with his head resting on the cushioned back. His eyes had closed for an instant, and when he opened them he found that her gaze was fixed upon him with a wistful questioning. She was drawing nearer to him with a half unconscious movement, and there was a strange sweetness in the look that met his.

"Oh," she said, "why didn't I see it sooner? And yet, what could I have done?"

She faltered suddenly; the wistfulness in her eyes had changed to something deeper. An expression had dawned upon her face which made her look all at once like a surprised, delighted child. She had discovered at last that it was her old hero, worn with life's conflict, saddened with life's sorrows, who had come to this quiet room of hers to rest. Just behind him, on the wall, hung the picture of Douglas, as it used to hang in the chamber where she had played in her childhood. The years of womanhood faded away in a moment; she was the little girl once more, murmuring her innocent fancies in the twilight, saying over and over again the words that rose spontaneously to her lips—"My knight, my knight!"

Wilmot Linn did not move, but sat perfectly still and watched her. The one feeling that overpowered him was the intense consciousness of a spiritual near-

ness to her; an awakening to the sudden sense of having found something which had been always his, and yet had been hidden or withheld.

He watched until he saw the look of pain come back into her deep gray eyes. Then he broke the silence.

"You must not—be anxious," he said, and put out his hand and touched hers. "I am only tired. To be here is a delicious rest."

There was another pause which seemed, somehow, to be full of unspoken words. Presently she had moved to the door, and spoken to Jane, who was coming upstairs. And in a little while she was waiting upon him, pouring out coffee, caring for him in little housewifely ways that were new in his solitary life. It was her quietness, and the softness of all her movements, that impressed him more than all else. There did not seem to be any need for much talking then. Her business was to refresh him and restore his wasted strength, and she threw her whole heart into her noiseless service.

"You have worked too hard," she said at last. "Is it right that you should always go to those who cry out to you to come?"

"It is right to go while I have strength enough to go," he answered. "Don't think that Abbott and Fordyce are not willing to do their part; they are more than willing. But I have worked longer than they have, and the work is easier to me than to them."

"Why should it be easier to you, Mr. Linn," she asked.

"Because I can see the souls in the dull bodies," he said quietly. "Don't fancy that I have a quick sight. My eyes needed years of training; my heart needed years of patience. After all, it is not only 'light, more light,' that we require, although we are always echoing Goethe's cry—it is 'love, more love.'"

It was no new truth that he uttered, it was something so old that Tracy felt all the sweetness of its familiarity. But a new singer may give a fresh charm to an old song.

She gave a swift glance backward over her past life, and those who had come into that life, and saw why she had failed to win many who ought to have been won. Personal grace and attractiveness had been hers in no common degree; but under these outward charms there had been the hot temper, and the impetuous desire to chastise an offender with her own hands. She had been disgusted a thousand times with the "dull bodies" which she had met with and touched. She had not gained that clearer sight which love alone can give—the love which perceives divinity because it is enamoured of the Divine.

"I have a great deal to learn," she said humbly; and he knew that she did not say it for the sake of being prettily contradicted. Already he was aware of her imperfections, and his thoughts about them were among the tenderest thoughts that he had of her. Her faults only deepened his conviction that she had need of him. Her sweetness only intensified the consciousness that he had need of her.

But outside these needs there were the needs of the world in which he worked. There were those endless claims which had taken more and more out of him as the years went on. He had been making homes for others all his life, unmindful of the possibility that he might, one day, long to make a home for himself.

This afternoon he gave himself up entirely to the quiet happiness of her companionship. To be soothed and fed, and waited upon—these were just the simple comforts that a tired worker craved. But it was something more than these services that she gave him; freely, even lavishly, her rich mind and heart poured all their stores into his.

He rose to go at last, and then paused to look round at her pictures.

"Do you like this?" she asked suddenly. "It is a study which I made last summer."

She pointed to a water-color drawing, plainly framed in oak. In the foreground, among feathery reeds and rushes, and blue forget-me-nots, there was an empty boat. And beyond lay a broad, bright sheet of water, shining with the gold of a solemn sunset, spreading far out into that great light until the horizon line was lost in glory.

"Yes," he said, slowly and thoughtfully. "The boat has carried the voyager safely through the windings of the river till he has gained the illimitable sea. And now it may stay there among the reeds and flowers, and go quietly to decay. It is a picture that I should like to see always."

"You shall see it always." Her face was radiant. "You must give it a place in your own room. I will send it there to-night."

"Thank you," he said. They had both been standing in front of the picture, and he took a step toward her. His eyes were fixed upon her face very steadfastly, and the soft repose of her manner seemed to give him strength.

"You shall do something else for me," he went on, "if you will. You shall paint the children of St. Monica's, study them, and let their souls be visible in their faces, so that the world may know them. Will you do this?"

"Indeed I will—as well as I can," she answered, lifting earnest eyes to his. "Have you found out that I love painting faces better than anything else? Mr. Linn, you shall find the faces for me, and I will find the souls in them."

"Then you may begin with Agatha March," he said, a light coming into his own face. "How happy that will make Pascoe! He has confided to me that she is his inspiration."

"But who is Agatha March?" she asked eagerly.

"The seamstress who lives with the matron at St. Monica's Home—the only home that she has ever known. She has always been a charity child; and now she makes clothes for the charity children, and still wears the dark-blue gown like the rest, although she is past eighteen. I don't think she cares to put off her uniform," he added, smiling. "She has a notion that she may put off some of her old simple happiness with it."

"And Pascoe Rayne, the young organist with the saintly face, is in love with her?" said Tracy, delighted with this glimpse of a romance.

"There must be something deeper than that," Wilmot Linn returned quietly. "Otherwise there will be no real union. Boys and girls fall in love often; men and women love only once. It is much easier to fall in love than to love."

Then he went his way, knowing that he should be drawn back again very soon. And, as he walked back in the November darkness to his quiet room, he was asking himself how all the other claims could still be met, if he answered this new claim?

Pascoe Rayne still watched and expected as days went on; but he kept all his thoughts locked up in his own mind. Abbott was silent, too; and Fordyce saw nothing. The fever was abating; they were tired with constant toil, and glad to take their rest. Mrs. Deale was blind, too. She was going on contentedly in the belief that things would always be as they had been. But there was another who saw what Pascoe saw, and that was Marget.

Tracy went to St. Monica's Home on a Monday morning, soon after breakfast. She took her sketch-book with her, and rang the bell quite boldly, sure of accomplishing the very thing that she had come to do. Never before, in all her life, had she felt such perfect confidence in her power to work. There was a sense of *rightness* now which had been lacking

in the days gone by. While she stood waiting at the door of the great, gloomy-looking house, she was basking in the wonderful light that had streamed in upon her world.

A little girl opened the door, and looked at her with intelligent eyes. She was a prim little figure, in a frock of dark-blue serge, and a brown holland apron with a bib. It was not an ugly costume, and it was perfectly fresh and neat, giving evidence of the wearer's honest pride in her appearance. Tracy explained that she had been sent by Mr. Linn, and asked if she could see Agatha March?

The little girl conducted her to a door at the end of the whitewashed passage, and ushered her into a small room, where a young woman sat at needle-work. There were such piles of garments round her, such heaps of hose and petticoats and calico, that it seemed impossible for one pair of hands to get through so much work in the course of a life. But Agatha was a person who lived by hours and days, doing all that she could lay hold of and see. She did not concern herself about the years; she always felt that time was given to her to be used up in small pieces, and used with care.

She stood up and bowed to Tracy with a simple grace and quietness which had come to her by nature. She wore her dark-blue gown and bibbed apron, and it seemed as if no other costume could so well have set off the glowing loveliness of the girl—a loveliness that needed neither ribbon nor gem. She was redundant with life, health, and energy, a splendid human flower which had blossomed into rich beauty in this smoky atmosphere. But there was no self-consciousness in her manner; and Tracy was struck by her expression of sweetness and simplicity.

No; she had never had her portrait taken, she said. Mr. Linn had sent a note to the matron to say that Miss Taunton was coming. She was willing to go to the studio if that was desired; but she hoped that

she might wear her uniform. She had never worn any other kind of dress, and could not feel at ease out of her blue gown.

"Indeed, I don't want you to wear anything else," said Tracy. "Your gown is charming; that deep, dark-blue shade will have a good effect in the picture. I can see that you are very happy in your home."

"Very happy," Agatha answered with her brilliant smile. "When I was first brought here there were only twenty girls; now we have thirty-five. But there will be room for fifty, Mr. Linn says."

Tracy looked at her for a moment in silent admiration. She had the peach-like complexion and vivid bloom which can make almost any face beautiful; but Agatha's beauty did not depend on her bloom. Her nose, slightly aquiline, had the sharply-cut nostril which indicates strong feeling; her crimson lips, full but not coarse, smiled faintly in repose. As to her eyes, they were those violet eyes often written about but rarely seen, which veil their rich color under dark lashes, and shine upon you with an unexpected light. The girl was aware of her charms, and rejoiced in them as a part of her bright life.

Tracy felt that Pascoe Rayne was loving wisely. He had that melancholy temperament which is so often associated with artistic gifts; and the sadness of his early boyhood clung to him still. Agatha's sunshiny nature, rich and vigorous, would blend naturally with his. She enjoyed living and out-giving, finding such fulness in her life that there was plenty to spare for others. Only a charity girl, without a relation in the world, she dwelt in the midst of green pastures, and walked beside the waters of comfort.

The matron came forward, eager to take the newcomer over the Home, and pour out her hopes and fears for its future. Everything depended on Mr. Linn; without him the institution would have dwin-

dled away, and gradually ceased to exist. But he had done much, and hoped to do more yet.

"If we could secure these premises at the back, Miss Taunton, there would be accommodation for fifty girls," the good woman went on. "Mr. Linn is straining every nerve for the children. People don't realize all the work that is done in this old corner of the city. It makes me glad to see a new face, because the new face means new help."

Tracy went back to her room with a deep peace in her heart. She had found her life-work. All the half-unconscious longings of years were about to be fulfilled. She had always wanted a motive for her work beside the love of art which had been her ruling passion. There had been the womanly need of a strong guide, and a true heart to trust in; the womanly desire to render help and comfort. Some inner voice told her that the old unsatisfied days had come to an end; the poor, thin wine had been given at the beginning of the feast; but the good wine had been kept until now.

Wilmot Linn had hung the water-color drawing over his mantel-piece; and Pascoe saw it, and asked no questions. About this time Mrs. Deale began to notice that her master was often absent from the study at five, and wondered if his habits were changing at last?

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOURS IN THE STUDIO.

“While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.”

—WORDSWORTH.

TRACY's picture of Agatha March made rapid progress. It was painted in oils, and was a small picture, yet large enough to do justice to the girl's glorious face. It represented Agatha as the artist had seen her first, busy with her needlework in the little whitewashed room. The eyes were uplifted as if she had heard some sudden call, and had looked up from her sewing to answer. There were gleams of light upon the rich brown hair, and on the heavy folds of the dark-blue gown.

“The picture is alive,” said Wilmot Linn, as he stood before the easel one day. “And the face glows with fresher beauty while one looks at it. It is a beauty that makes one think of rich perfumes, and deep hues of crimson on royal purple. There is a sumptuousness about Agatha, and you have expressed the girl's very nature.”

“It is the most ambitious thing I have ever attempted,” Tracy confessed. “All my powers have been cramped. Now, for the first time, I have room to move freely.”

“You have worked, hitherto, below your ability,” Wilmot said. “It is a pity to think of all those years spent in a narrow sphere. If you had come here sooner——”

He had turned away from the picture and was gazing steadily into her face—a face which looked like a small white flower. She waited to hear the end of the sentence, and there was something almost like the humility of appeal in her eyes.

“You came when it was time for you to come,” he went on, the rare smile curving his lips. “And those years were not wasted. Only it seems hard for us that we did not have you here then.”

Tracy possessed the charm of being able to stand still and silent with perfect grace. When she broke the silence which followed his last words she did not move. She spoke with an intense quietness which impressed him deeply.

“It would be a sad thing if I had brought away nothing but barren recollections out of those years, Mr. Linn. But there were mistakes set right; glimpses of a higher life; hopes that never soared so high as when they rose above graves. I have carried some rich memories out of that poor old past.”

There were happy meetings, now and then, in the studio on these winter days. Pascoe had grown friendly enough with Tracy to come in and inspect the progress of the picture. It did not surprise the artist that he chose to come sometimes when the model was sitting. His visits were no hindrance to the work; Tracy soon found that he was an unconscious helper. Like the wonderful painter in the American story, she saw that those two beautiful faces threw light upon each other.

As the portrait of the seamstress grew, you knew instinctively that Love had arrested her needle. It was no common call which had brought that glow into her upraised face. Some one had come into the room—into her life—and changed the peaceful calm into glory.

“They have the right feeling for each other,” Tracy said to the vicar. “If it had not been for

Pascoe I should not have seen her inner self so clearly. When he comes it seems as if her soul goes out to meet him."

"Does he see it?" Wilmot asked. "He had been distrustful, and had feared that she did not care for him much."

"He knows better now," Tracy answered. "And I, too, know her better than I did. Mr. Linn, don't you think it is possible for great personal beauty to hide the soul from us? We are apt to think that only ugliness can be a disguise. I almost believed at first that Agatha's splendid face was her all. Story-writers have been too hard on the beauties!"

"Yes," he said, "when the lamp is so rich the flame can hardly shine through it."

"I hope I shall get this picture into Burlington House," exclaimed Tracy, walking backward and looking at her work with loving eyes. "When I was a child I used to spend hours over a little daub, and go to bed with the rapturous notion that I had done something lovely. Next morning when I looked at it I found it hideous. Do you think there is any fear of my waking to-morrow and discovering that this thing is a fright? I am dreadfully afraid of delusions."

"This is no delusion," Wilmot Linn replied. "You have really done something lovely this time. But you have made me sorry for the child and her disappointments."

"She had a great many of them," Tracy said, with a smile of remembrance. "Very few people realize how children suffer over their failures. I cried bitterly once when I had painted an angel and grandma mistook it for a balloon."

"Do you know that is very pathetic?" Wilmot remarked, although he, too, was smiling.

"Yes," she answered. "Even when I grew older I never tried to paint an angel again. I was always afraid that it would turn out balloonishly."

"There is compensation for you in these days," said the vicar. "You express your ideas now; although the power of complete expression is never given to anyone on earth. You are a success, and the world will soon know it."

"I shall owe my success to the children of St. Monica's," she returned, her gray eyes shining. "And if I make money I shall give it to the Home. For myself, I can live on very little; somehow I have never wanted to be a rich woman."

Wilmot Linn drew a deep breath. The words that he longed to say were trembling on his lips at that moment. But, knowing how poor he was, how could he say them then? It was such a hard life that he must ask her to share; a life full of worries, and demands, and perplexities that she did not even dream of. Yet if he remained silent it was for her sake. If he had been a more selfish man he would have spoken out his love there and then. The habit of self-denial, strengthened by long years of practice, drove back the declaration.

"You must think of yourself first of all," he said, with a thrill of tenderness in his voice. "You have had sorrows, and you are not strong. But after the strength comes back, and all due care has been taken of you, then——"

"Then I shall spend all my energies on the children!" she exclaimed joyfully. "Oh, you can scarcely understand how sweet it will be! I am so fond of anything that is young, and has to be helped. When you help old people they are apt to take offence, although they need your aid badly enough. But the child puts its hand into yours, and asks to be guided and led. And the girl comes to you with her love-troubles, and the boy tells you his shy hopes. It is delightful!"

But he did understand. He could read the inner story through the outside story that every one knew. For years she had starved for lack of that young

companionship which would have been spiritual refreshment. Grandma had never been able to comprehend Tracy's delight in the society of children. But then grandma had been filled with the notion that she, herself, was sufficient for all cravings; she had felt that, until Tracy was suitably married, she ought to be perfectly satisfied with her grandmother.

Oh, those bygone years! A wave of bitter regret swept over Wilmot Linn's heart again. Why could he not have met this woman earlier, so that they might have lived and worked as one? It was for her that he had been waiting, conscious that his life was incomplete, and believing that what he waited for would never be his in this world. And now, just when he was pressed down with burdens and worn out with anxious labor, she had come.

Then he looked at her radiant face, and took comfort, thankful for all that was given her. More was yet to come; the time was surely drawing near when he might speak out and claim her. For the present there was intimate companionship, peaceful talk, and a sense of rest whenever he came into her sphere. And that sphere to him was home.

He glanced round the room which she had made so personal that everything in it seemed to speak of her. Lamp and fire were burning with a steady glow; the softness of the light mellowed all the details, and deepened the touches of color. Here a scarlet fan took an intenser hue; there an amber jar stood vividly out of the rich shadow; and in the midst of these warm shades and subdued lights Tracy moved, a graceful, slender figure, making the picture perfect. To Wilmot it sometimes seemed as if they two must have sat here together every day for years; it was all so natural and familiar and restful.

It was six o'clock when he went downstairs and passed out of the private entrance of the house, which opened into Budge Lane. The evening was dark and fine; the air was cold, and there were stars

shining high above the roofs and spires. As Mr. Linn came forth from the doorway he almost ran against a dwarfish figure which was standing there.

"I beg your pardon," he said mechanically; and the figure sped away into the lane and vanished. It was far too dark for him to have caught a glimpse of its face; but there flashed upon him a sudden consciousness that it was some one whom he knew. The flash passed as swiftly as it came; the trivial incident was forgotten in a moment; and he quickened his steps, remembering the letters that must be written before the last post went out.

He found Pascoe in the study, waiting to help him; and as they sat down together at the writing-table he was struck with the look of happiness on the young fellow's face.

"I have been to see a certain picture, Pascoe," he said with a smile.

"Does Miss Taunton practise white magic?" young Rayne asked, blushing. "It has seemed as if I knew Agatha better on canvas than I have ever known her before. She has drawn out Agatha's hidden self, and revealed her to me."

"She has painted not merely the features but the mind and heart," the vicar answered. "That is what every true artist does. He looks for the soul, and fixes its light upon the face. Miss Taunton has shown you the true Agatha, Pascoe—the girl whose heart responds to yours. You may throw your doubts away."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MARGET.

“The first part was a tissue of hugged lies;
The second was its ruin fraught with pain:
Why raise the fair delusion to the skies
But to be dashed again?”

—C. ROSSETTI.

CHRISTMAS had come and gone; January had set in with bitter winds, and there had been a light fall of snow. Marget Rayne hated winter, and complained unceasingly of the cold, although her brother had bought a long, thick cloak to protect her from the weather.

“I wish it hadn’t been dark-blue,” she said. “I hate dark blue; it makes me think of the charity girls at the Home.”

She accompanied her words with one of those malicious glances through her yellow lashes which Pascoe had learnt to dread.

“I don’t know why you should hate to think of the Home,” he answered, rather coldly. “The girls have never done you any harm.”

“Mr. Linn makes too great a fuss with them,” she replied. “They won’t be fit for work if they are spoilt. And they will give themselves airs.”

“I never saw a more modest, simple-hearted set of girls!” he said indignantly.

“O Pascoe, how silly you are! Any one can see that you have lost your head about Agatha March, and she doesn’t care a straw for you. Miss Taunton has made her vainer than ever. She has praised

her to her face, and put her into a picture, as if she were the queen of beauty instead of just a common, pretty girl."

Pascoe was as angry as his sweet nature ever permitted him to be. It might have been better for Marget if he had spoken out as plainly to her as most young men would have done. But from his earliest childhood he had learnt to pity her, and bear with her temper. His father, often unjust to his son, was full of compassion for his deformed daughter; and no one had ever rebuked Marget for those outbursts of spite which were only too frequent. "She cannot help it, poor thing," was the usual comment on her venomous speeches. And Pascoe had fallen into the habit of thinking that Marget ought to be forgiven for everything.

Growing up, as he had done, so close to her unwholesome and unhappy life, it was well for him that he escaped without harm. But the disease which affects our bodies generally finds some predisposition which it seizes upon and develops; and the soul mysteriously and unconsciously invites the evil which blights its well-being. Pascoe's nature did not attract bad influences. Religion and art were blended in his life; he had been sad often, but never miserable; lonely, but never forlorn. Each spirit lives in its own separate world, and Marget had never entered Pascoe's world at all; she had only touched upon its borders through her taste for music.

She was painstaking, and had learnt to play well; but there was no poetry in her playing. There are certain strange melodies hidden in the organ which are only yielded to the player who can evoke them. Marget never drew any note from the instrument which you did not expect to hear. She played with care and judgment, imitating Pascoe as closely as she could; but she could not catch his inspiration.

"After all," she said after a pause, "it is that Taunton woman who deserves to be blamed. Why

did she come here, and fill the girls' empty heads with vanity? The first time I ever saw her face——”

“Do stop, Marget,” entreated Pascoe earnestly. “We are wasting the afternoon. Is that the piece you wish me to hear you play?”

He pointed to an open music-book which she was holding upon her knees. Brother and sister had met in the church for their usual practising on Saturday, and Marget had sat down in the choir-stalls instead of taking her place on the organ-stool. She was brimful of bitterness, and longed to give vent to her feelings; but Pascoe would not let her talk to her heart's content. Moreover, there might be other listeners.

She rose reluctantly, and went to the organ with a bad grace. Pascoe stood by her side, pulling out the stops, turning the leaves, and giving hints now and then. She played very well, despite her ill-temper, and he could honestly praise her. Her brow had cleared when the piece came to an end.

“You have made great progress,” he said, as she rested. “I am really proud of you.”

She smiled. The light from the music-stand fell on her face, and showed its softened expression.

“If all my pupils were as good as you are I should be one of the most successful of teachers,” he went on, glad to have soothed her.

“Pascoe,” she said thoughtfully, “do you think that I shall ever get my heart's desire? I don't mean my chief desire—never mind what that is—but something that comes second to it. If I believed that I should one day be the organist of St. Monica's I could be almost happy.”

“I think you have good reason to hope,” he answered. “Although I love the dear church and its associations, it is natural that I should aspire to a more important post. Mr. Linn has always encouraged me in this ambition. And if I am removed, you will be very likely to fill my place.”

"How can you talk so calmly of being removed?" she exclaimed suddenly. "If I thought I should ever be taken away from St. Monica's I should die!"

She lifted her hand with a vehement gesture, and raised her voice passionately.

"Come," said Pascoe, "you have rested long enough. Play 'Silver Trumpets' as a finish."

She obeyed, and was again warmly praised. While she was rolling up her music he took her seat, and played a voluntary.

As Marget, poor girl, loved to pour out her heart's bitterness in hard words, so Pascoe poured forth his heart's sweetness in lovely sounds. Both natures needed an outpouring. At his call, all the richness and tenderness contained in those old pipes came forth. Mellow notes of supplication, pathetic notes of soft complaint, holy notes of benediction, solemn notes of exultation—all were heard. It was the experience of a spiritual life told in music. Two persons, who stood listening at the dark end of the church, felt that the player was expressing all their past and future for them. They stood close together in silence until the sweet sounds ceased; then both drew a long breath, and looked toward each other in the half-darkness.

"I never heard you play better, Pascoe," said Mr. Linn, as they came forward into the light. "We thank you with all our hearts."

When Marget caught sight of the vicar's companion her face became distorted with passion. Wilmot looked at the girl kindly, and noticed that she was strangely moved.

"Have you, too, been playing, Marget?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered in a choked voice.

She took up her music, pushed rudely past Tracy, and rushed out into the winter darkness, as miserable a woman as could be found in the great city that evening.

It was snowing a little; but if Marget had gone

out barefooted into the slippery street she would scarcely have felt the cold. She did not hear the exclamations of the angry men as she jostled them in her headlong haste; she could not feel the pavement beneath her feet. A fire was burning within her so fiercely that it scorched her cheeks and parched her tongue. She dashed across Cannon Street, escaping hoofs and wheels by one of those miracles which seem to be so often wrought for frenzied humanity. Going down Dowgate Hill she slipped and fell, but was up in a moment, and reached her own door in safety.

Without knowing how she ascended the winding stairs, she found herself in her room.

It was quite dark, and only a faint red glow came from a morsel of fire; but the windows of the opposite buildings were lighted up brightly, and she could see figures moving to and fro.

She tore off her hat and cloak and flung them on the bed. Then, with a half-suppressed yell of rage, she threw herself down upon the floor, and rolled in a sort of madness; howling at intervals. There was no one near to hear her; she was free to give vent to the fury that possessed her until it had spent itself.

At last, tired out with its violence, the fierce little body lay still.

There was a deep silence in the small room; the fire still glowed, now and then a cinder fell, and that was the only sound to be heard there. Pascoe Rayne, after knocking at the door and getting no answer, came in.

“Marget,” he said anxiously, “Marget!”

A faint moan was the sole reply. Pascoe’s heart seemed to stop beating for an instant: he felt a vague sense of coming horror which almost mastered him.

“Marget,” he said again, “for heaven’s sake, speak! Where are you?”

She was silent, and he advanced cautiously, hold-

ing out his hands. The fire favored him; a small flame shot up suddenly out of the embers, and revealed the figure that was lying close to the fender.

He stooped down, and would have raised her in his arms, but she struck at him wildly.

"Let me alone," she said, in an odd, muffled voice.

It was such a relief to find that she was neither dead nor fatally injured, that Pascoe stood upright with a deep sigh of thankfulness. Then he remembered that the match-box was usually to be found on the mantel-piece; and he groped for it, with success.

When he had lighted the gas he returned to the figure on the hearth-rug. But Marget plainly was in no need of assistance; she got up without difficulty, and seated herself on the side of the bed.

"The fire is going out," he said; "you will take cold."

"What does it matter?" she asked gloomily.

He put on some fuel and coaxed it into a blaze. Next he set out the little black tea-pot, and cup and saucer, and proceeded to make tea, doing everything with the quiet deftness which characterized all his movements. Marget did not stir; she sat and watched him with a scowl.

"Come, dear," he said, when the preparations were finished. "You are chilled, and it is no wonder. The hot tea will do you good."

"I won't touch it," she declared with a stamp. "I don't know why you have followed me here. It is hard that I can't be permitted to rest in peace."

"I was afraid that you would be ill," he answered, in his gentlest tone. "The vicar was quite concerned; he said that he could see there was something wrong."

"He said that, did he?" Marget's glance and voice were very sharp.

"Yes, indeed he did. Be a good girl and drink some tea. I wish there was something nicer for you to eat than bread-and-butter. To-morrow you shall have a slice of Mrs. Deale's cake."

"I'm not a child to be pacified with cake," she replied tartly. "Did Mr. Linn tell you to run after me when I left the church?"

"He said I had better go and see what was the matter," returned Pascoe, taking her hand in his. "Come and sit by the fire, and I will make some toast."

"Do leave off talking about things to eat," she exclaimed pettishly. Nevertheless she rose and consented to sit in the chair by the fire; and he saw that she was mollified.

"Are you feeling better now?" he asked, after waiting till her cup was half empty, and ministering to her wants with careful attention.

"I am no worse," she admitted; and then there was another pause. She broke it suddenly.

"Pascoe, don't you see that things have been going badly ever since Miss Taunton came? She has cast a spell over the vicar. I don't know how she has done it, for she's not at all pretty; but I think she is a sort of witch. I hate her pale face, and horrid, soft ways. Oh, how I hate her!"

"Do hush, Marget dear," her brother implored. "You will make yourself quite ill again."

"I shan't make myself ill with talking. It is a relief to speak, and there's no one to speak to but you. Pascoe, tell me that he doesn't care for her. If I thought that he did really care for her I should go mad!"

The young man stood resting his arm on the narrow ledge of the mantel-shelf, and gazing into the fire with a distressed look. Marget's wild words filled him with trouble, and made him bitterly ashamed of her. He answered her with unwonted sternness.

"Marget, it ought not to concern you if he does care for her. You know that he is free to do as he likes. He has lived for years a beautiful, unselfish life; and if at last he has found——"

Marget sprang up, and wrung her hands.

"I know what you are going to say," she cried. "Don't go on. Pascoe, if it ever comes to pass I will not bear it."

"We must bear everything that comes. Dear Marget, sit down and be reasonable. There is something that you have not noticed, but which I have seen coming on for a long time. Mr. Linn's strength is wearing out. He is not the man that he was once."

Pascoe spoke solemnly, laying his hand on the girl's heaving shoulder. His words subdued her, and she sank back into her chair, trembling and awe-stricken. She knew that he always spoke the truth, and the terrible fear thus suddenly presented to her mind had an overwhelming influence.

"Do you think he is going to die?" she asked faintly.

"No, no, I only meant that he was worn and wearied. And I think it is probable that he will have to go away for a rest. It is long since he has had a good holiday; he has gone on and on in the old way, forgetting himself, and I believe——"

"You believe what?"

"That he will never remember himself unless some one else becomes a part of himself. That's badly expressed, I know," Pascoe added. "I'm afraid I can't make my meaning clear to you, Marget. But I want you to feel that you ought to welcome any change that is for his good."

She was silent. He stooped and kissed her tenderly.

"I must go now," he said. "My dear little sister, I wish I could give you a brighter home. It is terribly lonely here, isn't it?"

"No," she answered, "I'm not lonely. There's the music, and there are lots of things to do. You need not worry yourself about me."

He went his way, carrying a heavy heart with him, as he always did after a tête-à-tête with Marget.

This wild passion of hers seemed to be assuming formidable dimensions. She was nursing and cherishing it until it bade fair to overshadow her whole life.

Left to herself, Marget sat and mused by the fire, going over all that Pascoe had said. The violence of her fury had subsided; she was tired and languid now, and could think calmly. She had faith in her brother; but she knew his tendency to melancholy, and asked herself if he had not taken too dark a view of things?

It was easy, after a time, to believe that Pascoe was wrong. Mr. Linn was merely tired, not ill at all. As for Miss Taunton, if she were really as clever as every one supposed, she would become a great artist, go away from this neighborhood and forget them all. The very thought of Tracy's departure brought new life and hope to Marget, who was only too ready to creep back into her fool's paradise.

While Pascoe, anxious and disturbed, was wondering how his sister would get through the night, she was moving about her room in high spirits, a new creature.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TOGETHER.

“I have no words to tell what way we walked,
 What unforgotten path now closed and sealed;
I have no words to tell all things we talked,
 All things that he revealed.”

—C. ROSSETTI.

IN these days Tracy was so happy that she asked no questions of her heart. To have found her ideal realized, this alone was happiness. Everything that Wilmot Linn said or did, every look in his face, came to her with a sweet sense of familiarity. It seemed to her that she had always known him.

It has been well said by a modern writer that “when intercourse is very close and very frequent, so complete is the exchange of souls, that recognizable bits of one soul begin to show in the other’s nature, and the second is conscious of a similar and growing debt to the first. This mysterious approximating of two souls who has not witnessed?” Pascoe, quietly observant, witnessed it constantly.

Those spring days found Wilmot Linn continually turning over in his mind a problem which has puzzled many single men. How was it possible to blend another life with his own without disturbing all those lives that had grown up around him? Meanwhile he said nothing of this inner questioning to the person whom it chiefly concerned.

Tracy was, as he had predicted, a success. Her picture of Agatha March was accepted and honored with a good place; and it attracted the attention of

all the leading art critics. Her delight was so honest and child-like that it made Wilmot feel young. She was full of plans and hopes which he could not help sharing.

"I shall do wonders for the Home," she said. "Do you know that Jane actually asked a silly question this morning? When a sensible person says a silly thing it positively gives one a shock. She asked if I meant to seek new quarters?"

"And you will not?" His eyes anticipated her answer.

"Of course I will not. I have learned to love my city home too well. All my best thoughts have come to me here; how can I tell that they would follow me elsewhere?"

The face that she turned toward him at that moment was marvellously bright. Never, even in her younger days, had she looked as radiant as she did then. All the good things that she had desired seemed to have been showered upon her at once.

"I do see," he said slowly. And his smile was so beautiful, and so full of deep meaning, that she felt, just then, a pressure of happiness almost too great to bear. He was still holding the hand that he had taken when he came in, and he went on to say that he had come to make a request.

"Next Wednesday," he continued, "is Mr. Lazelle's birthday. My own birthday is unknown, and so I have borrowed his. When I was a child he always gave me that day as a feast-day; all the joy that I ever had came through him."

He paused for an instant. The eyes, looking into hers with such an intense gaze, grew misty; and involuntarily her hand nestled itself more closely into his.

"And we remember his birthday still," he said. "There is an old friend of his and mine, a Mrs. Willwood, who keeps up the feast. She lives in a quiet old house down by the river; and always, on the

thirtieth of June, I go there with Fordyce and Pascoe, and some of the children from the Home. We spend most of the time in the hayfields; it is just a simple, wholesome holiday. Will you come with us?"

"Yes," she said joyfully, "I will come. And Agatha?"

"We shall have Agatha," he answered. "And we shall take Pascoe's sister Marget, a poor girl who has very few pleasures."

Tracy suddenly called up a vision of the deformed figure and strange, malignant face which had sometimes crossed her path.

"Marget Rayne," she said after a pause. "Yes, I have seen her several times. But—is she quite like other people?"

"Not quite," he replied. "I think Pascoe grieves over her in silence. She has peculiarities, and the dear fellow finds her temper uncertain. We shall try to give her a happy day."

"You love to give people happy days," she said.

"Think of all the happy days that were given to me through one man's influence," he returned, with that quick lighting-up of the face that no one, who had once seen, could ever forget. "And think how easy it is to enrich the lives nearest to us. Such a little thing will do it; a pleasant word spoken here; a helpful word there; even a smile given, when one has nothing else to give. The wonder is that we don't give more; the pity is that we forget, even for an hour, the perpetual needs of humanity."

A faint shadow came over Tracy's brightness. She spoke with a touch of regret.

"I can be pleasant sometimes," she admitted. "But not to every one, always. It is so fearfully hard. I have not found it hard often, because I have seldom been sorely tried."

As the words passed her lips she thought again of the deformed girl who had given her malicious

glances for her civil words. Insignificant as Marget was, the holiday would lose something if she shared it. After all, it takes the merest trifle to spoil a day's pleasure.

"You do not know what good you have done," said Wilmot gently. "I am always hearing of Miss Taunton's kindnesses. Many of our best gifts are unconsciously given. Don't you remember that—

"The gift without the giver is bare'?

It is the spontaneous outgiving of *ourselves*—of the life that is in us—that blesses others."

Mrs. Willwood was not a rich woman; but she lived in a house which had been her father's before her, and welcomed her friends to a peaceful home. It was a gray house, made green with ivy, and overgrown with flowery creepers. The swallows knew it well, and darted in and out of the old chimney; birds sang round it all through the long summer days. The garden went sloping down to the fields, and the fields shelved away to the river. Cows stood half-hidden in the long grass by the water-side; a boat floated among the weeds, and you caught glimpses of the fishes gliding about in the clear brown shallows. It was a sweet pastoral country here, seen through delicate veils of light and shade; and to Tracy it seemed as if she had come to a silent, sunshiny dreamland.

Wilmot Linn found a bench in a nook between the trees, and led her away from the hayfield to sit there and rest. It was afternoon; the banks cast long shadows into the water, green tendrils and straggling flowery trailers drooped down to meet the ripples; all was lovely; everywhere there was the splendor of a bright peace.

He looked at Tracy's happy face, as she sat by his side. Surely this was a veritable glimpse of the earthly paradise.

"This is a little bit of rest for you," she said, suddenly and softly, as she turned toward him. "You are looking pale and tired. Is there anything the matter?"

"There are the usual little worries," he answered. But it was evident that he was not thinking of worries then; and his eyes seemed to draw hers to meet them. She did meet them for an instant; then a faint pink tinted her cheeks, and gave an indescribable freshness and girlishness to her face.

"The little foxes spoil the vines, don't they?" she said. "And the little drops wear away the stone. Ah, Mr. Linn, I wish you would take care of yourself!"

He made a slight movement which brought him closer to her side.

"You have made my life dearer to me than it has ever been before," he said gently. "I have really determined to take a holiday. There is an old man in Scotland who has often asked me to stay with him, and I will go and get fresh air and quiet."

"You really will go?" she asked. "You won't let any one turn you from your purpose? Promise me!"

"I do promise you," he replied. "There is a reason why I want to see Mr. McDougall—a reason which I will explain to you later on. Years ago, in my Oxford days, I saved his only son from drowning, and he has insisted that he is my debtor ever since. The son died last year, and he is utterly alone now."

"Ah, then I know you will go!" she said, with a sigh of relief. "And now, we must make the most of this enchanting day. It is a day that will light up all future days. I have been in country places often enough; but I have never found such a charm anywhere else. Why is it?"

"I think," he answered quietly, "it is because we are together."

The confession did not surprise her in the least. After all, there was little need to put the sense of oneness into words. Sitting there side by side, hints were taken, and looks understood which conveyed the gist of long and delicate explanations. Each lived by faith; each was willing to wait a little longer before the bond should be revealed to the world.

"Oh!" she said, looking away across the sun-dappled grass, "shall we ever be happier than we are at this moment? In another world shall we ever know a sweeter feeling than this?"

"It is the best part of all our love here that will survive," he answered. "Do not doubt it. The bodies of things must always perish when their time comes. But the souls of things must always live."

A stable clock struck five. It was the hour for joining the rest of the party, and both rose instinctively from their seat. Yet they lingered; Tracy, with her head thrown back a little, looked at the sunny lights quivering on the water. He had come so close to her that she rested against him, feeling the light pressure of his arm.

They stood thus, in happy silence, for half a minute, perhaps; and then there was a slight rustle in the grass near. In the next instant, Marget Rayne, holding her hat in her hand, suddenly appeared before them.

The summer light poured over her misshapen figure, and touched the dazzling red gold of her hair. There was something so strange and witch-like in her aspect, and so intensely malicious in her gaze, that Tracy felt a painful thrill of fear.

"I have come to call you to tea," the girl said.

"We are coming," returned Wilmot Linn. "The clock has only just struck. Have you enjoyed yourself, Marget?"

"Not so much as other people have," she answered, with another look at Tracy.

"How is that? We all came here prepared to be happy," said Mr. Linn kindly.

"Some people monopolize everything," rejoined Marget mysteriously. "Some have to eat the crust while others devour the cake. It's a great shame."

"Why, Marget, there is cake enough for everybody," Wilmot said with a smile. "You will find piles of it on the long table under the trees."

"Oh, yes; that sort of cake is common enough," she replied.

All three walked back toward the house; but once or twice Marget fell into the rear. She tormented herself by examining Miss Taunton critically, and trying to believe that she was badly dressed. And yet—oh, poor Marget! could anything be more perfect than that soft gray gown, fitting closely to the slender figure and revealing all its grace? As they drew near the garden gate she left them altogether and stealthily climbed the fence that divided the shrubbery from the fields. Thus she reached the lawn by a short cut, and joined the group who stood waiting for their coming.

Mrs. Willwood was charmed with Tracy. As she watched the pair advancing toward her, crossing sunshine and shadow, she turned to young Fordyce to say words that came spontaneously from her lips.

"They are made for each other," she said.

The curate looked at her blankly through his spectacles.

"You don't think he will ever marry, do you?" he asked.

"Why should he not?" the widow demanded.

"Well, there certainly is no reason why he should not," admitted Fordyce with a perturbed air. "But if he does there will be many changes."

"One always expects changes when there is a marriage," Mrs. Willwood replied. "I wish he would get married. Then he would be rested and cared

for. All you stupid men do not know how to look after him properly."

"We have an excellent housekeeper," said Fordyce feebly.

"I dare say you have. I know precisely what excellent housekeepers are worth. The truth is, Mr. Fordyce, that celibacy is a wretched mistake."

"Is it really?" said the curate in an innocent voice.

They all sat down to tea in that old-fashioned garden of lilies and yew hedges. The meal was a long one; every one was in high spirits; even Marget seemed to have forgotten her ill-humor for a little while. They lingered until the light was turning yellow, and the shadows were beginning to grow long; and then the party said their adieux to their hostess, and all set off to the railway station.

Pascoe had eyes and ears for Agatha only; she was under his especial care, and he could scarcely spare a thought to his sister. Mr. Fordyce was occupied with the younger ones; Marget had to shift for herself.

While they waited on the platform for their train to come up, her jealous eyes were keenly watchful. Tracy and Mr. Linn were standing together; the air was getting chilly, and Marget saw him take the light woollen shawl which she carried, and fold it round her shoulders. He was a long time in doing this, Marget thought; he lingered over that slight woman as if he found delight in every touch, wrapping the shawl about her throat, and bending down to look with loving eyes intently into hers.

Alas, how Marget hated her!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FROM SOUL TO SOUL.

“How have our lives and wills (as haply erst
They were, ere this forgetfulness begun)
Through all their earthly distantness outburst,
And melted, like two rays of light, in one.”

—LOWELL.

FROM that day by the river there was a change in Wilmot Linn. He had become almost feverishly anxious for his holiday. In looking back upon this time afterward all those around him remembered his anxiety, and saw how it was controlled by his sweet habit of patience.

John Abbott, the senior curate, did all that he could to hurry on Wilmot's departure. Abbott was a grave man, devoted to his work; and he realized more fully than any of the others how much that work had exhausted the strength of Wilmot Linn. If he guessed that a new influence had swayed the vicar's life, he kept the knowledge to himself.

It was scarcely three weeks before the paths of Wilmot and Tracy diverged again; and both seemed to themselves and to each other to be hurrying through the days. She knew that he was looking forward to solving that problem of his, although he had never told her so in words. And she saw that the anxiety was wearing him.

They had come to the last week in July. Tracy, herself unsettled, beheld everything in the glow of a wonderful light which lay, like a sunny haze, over the future. She, too, was hastening her depar-

ture from London; Laura was writing entreating letters from the country; Kate had got engaged to a new-comer in the neighborhood, and the mother could not make up her mind to like him. She wanted Tracy's opinion; Tracy, when she chose to come out of her world of dreams, could be shrewd in her judgment.

Wilmot Linn came to see her on her last evening; and they were together for a few minutes in the light of the sunset. They had not much to say to each other just then. It was only to be a parting for four short weeks; they repeated this over and over again, looking into each other's faces in the stillness and glow of the hour.

"When I have seen Mr. McDougall I shall be more satisfied," Wilmot Linn admitted. "You will not be away longer than a month? I shall return before you; three weeks are all that I can spare."

"I have promised to give Laura a month," she replied. "But I don't think that I need so long a holiday. Every one says that I have gained strength wonderfully since I came here. However, I must not offend Laura and her girls."

"No," he said, "you must not offend any one. It is only saying good-by for a very little while," he added, his eyes looking down on her, deep and solemn with intense feeling.

"For a very little while," she repeated, with a faint quiver in her sweet voice.

"Thank you for all your goodness to me," he said suddenly, yet with great gentleness.

"Thank you for all the bright hours you have given me, and the comfort that has sweetened my life."

The next instant he saw that tears had risen in her eyes.

"No," she said, "I will not let you thank me, Mr. Linn. Why should I? It is *my* life that has been sweetened and comforted. You do not realize all that you have done for me!"

He held her hand in silence. The look that she saw in his face could scarcely have been expressed in any words he knew. And yet he might have spoken if Pascoe, an unwilling intruder, had not come at that moment to the door.

"I am sorry to trouble you, sir," he said. "But they think that Walker is really dying this time, and he says that he can't go without seeing you."

So Wilmot Linn went away. He paid his visit to the sick man, and then started for Scotland by mail train.

In the early morning Tracy rose, her heart still full of gladness, and drove away to the railway station. Jane Shaw looked after the departing cab for a moment, wishing that she, too, were going off to woods and green fields. But Jane and her family were prospering as they had never done in the old rural days, and after a sigh or two she turned back to her household work with a contented mind.

"Why do you all look at me so?" demanded Tracy, standing in the middle of a group of relations. "You stare as if I were a ghost, and you expected me to vanish into vapor!"

"No," said Laura, "you are not nearly so ghost-like as you were when we saw you last. You have certainly become more substantial. And there is something new about you—a curious freshness and brightness which can't be defined!"

"Laura, you are getting poetical," cried Tracy, with a little laugh. "Freshness and brightness at my age! A woman with marriageable nieces!"

"Indeed, Aunt Tracy, you are looking surprisingly young. And your face is fuller," said Kate, touching the soft cheek. "Yet you must have worked very hard, for people are talking about your picture. We thought that you would come to us jaded and tired, and we made up our minds to pet you."

"Always carry out good intentions," returned Tracy, with a glance at the well-spread table. "I

am ready for any amount of petting, and any quantity of nice things to eat."

"Dear me, you are very much altered," Mrs. Dawley remarked. "What a miserable appetite you used to have at the Laurels!"

"Oh, that was a hundred years ago, at least!" cried Tracy lightly. "I am a robust person nowadays."

"Are you not going to move away from that dreadful place in the City?" asked Laura, in just the old voice of remonstrance. "When people want to know where you are living I am ashamed to tell them."

"There is no reason why you should blush for me, is there?" inquired Tracy calmly. "I do not drop my h's, and my conversation does not savor of the Stock Exchange."

"But is there any one to associate with? You used to be so particular about your friends, Tracy!"

"I am particular now." Her smile was sweet, but inscrutable. "Still if you think I have deteriorated, Laura, you can tell me so."

"Oh, no; you have not deteriorated. And of course we are all proud of your success. I suppose it *is* the success, Tracy, that has made you so wonderfully bright. It can't be city air, you know, can it?"

"No," said Tracy softly, "it can't be city air; although that isn't quite as pestilential as you fancy. So I suppose it must be the success."

The warm summer days went by in a tranquil, yet busy fashion. Kate's lover was introduced to Tracy, and approved of; and then she gladly undertook the task of convincing Frank and Laura that he was worthy of the high honor of being their son-in-law. She enjoyed her rambles in the woods, the sweet country air, the simple delights of a rustic life; and yet she found herself wishing that the hours would fly faster. Would the end of the month never come?

It wanted, at last, only three days to the time of

her departure. A cheerful letter from Jane Shaw had told her that her rooms were in apple-pie order, and that Mr. Linn had come back to the clergy-house. Ben had seen him, and had reported that he was in good spirits. And after reading that letter Tracy's heart throbbed with thankfulness and joy.

Only three more days! She had been out walking one afternoon, and had gone farther than usual, and was tired. Her bedroom, with its fresh white draperies and vine-wreathed casements, was full of dreamy evening light. It was so peaceful and still here, that she sank down, in a pleasant kind of weariness, on the white bed; and, in a few moments, fell asleep.

It was not perhaps a very profound sleep. She was vaguely conscious, all the while, that Kate's doves were cooing in their wicker cage under the porch; and yet she had sunk into a complete rest of body and mind. She lay in the light shade of the white curtain, and now and then the flower-scented air breathed softly on her closed eyes.

Suddenly, yet gently, she was awakened. A voice, softer than the summer air, had spoken to her. It was as if the words had been uttered by some one who had bent over her face while she slept, and then passed on.

She lifted her head from the pillow, happy, rested, filled with a delightful peace. It was Wilmot Linn's voice which had roused her so softly; and he had said, or seemed to say:

“Remember that we shall never be parted.”

He must have been thinking of her, she said to herself; it was just one of those cases of thought-transference which only seem mysterious because we do not yet know the spiritual capabilities within us. She rose, and gave a glance at the little clock on the mantel-piece. The hands were pointing to half-past four.

As she stood before the glass arranging her hair, and putting on a fresh ruffle, her fingers trembled slightly. She was filled with any indescribable feeling of happiness and confidence—a feeling which had nothing in common with any ordinary excitement that she had ever known. How had the voice come to her? Was it an echo from some memory-cavern within herself, or had it travelled through the air to reach her outward ears? It was impossible to know.

The hour of departure came two days later. There were the usual farewell words and kisses; and then followed the drive to the quiet railway station, and the uneventful journey home.

It was afternoon when she found herself once more before the familiar door in Budge Lane. Jane's husband came out to help the cabman with the luggage, and it struck her at once that his face was very grave.

"Are they all well, Shaw?" she asked quickly.

"Yes, miss, all well."

She went up the long dark stairs with a chill upon her heart. Something was coming, something awaited her. Jane was standing outside the open door of the studio with hands outstretched in welcome. Quietly, and with gentle force, she drew Tracy into the room, and put her into an easy-chair.

CHAPTER XL.

LEFT ALONE.

“When shall they meet? I cannot tell
Indeed when they shall meet again,
Except some day in Paradise;
For this they wait, one waits in pain;
Beyond the sea of death love lies
Forever, yesterday, to-day:
Angels shall ask them, ‘Is it well?’
And they shall answer, ‘Yea.’”

—C. ROSSETTI.

“JANE, what is it. You have something to tell me.”

There was a determined look in Tracy’s face—a look which said plainly that she was resolved, at any cost, to hear the truth.

“Yes, Miss Tracy.” Jane’s voice shook painfully. “Yes. And it is something about Mr. Linn.”

“Is he dead?”

Jane’s lips opened and closed again. She was trembling like a leaf.

“Speak,” said Tracy, imperiously.

“He—is dead.”

It seemed to the poor woman that the face on which she was gazing had suddenly turned to stone. Every tinge of color had faded from the lips; there was no sound, not even a sigh, to break the awful stillness.

But the strength which had always come to Jane Shaw at an emergency did not fail her now. She unfastened the cloak, threw off the travelling cap,

and tenderly drew the slight form into her arms. Ben was near at hand, and came promptly in answer to his mother's call. To the two eager watchers it was a long time before the still figure stirred once more. As Jane smoothed the dark hair away from the delicate face that lay cold and white upon her shoulder, she thought of the days when she had soothed the passionate child long ago. Tracy did not speak, but she moved closer to the faithful servant; and Jane, holding her in her strong arms, bent over her, comforting her with loving words, as though she had been a little girl again.

When Tracy made an effort at last to rise from the easy-chair, she found that she could scarcely stand without support. Twilight was coming on; gray shadows were darkening in the room, and she shivered from head to foot. But Ben had lighted a fire; her chair was moved to the hearth, and they coaxed her to sit down and be still.

The old wish that has come to millions of stricken hearts was rising in hers at that moment, as she sat shivering by the blaze. Oh, that she could follow him! Was there no way—no sinless way—to escape from this mortal prison, and be free to go where he had gone? She gave a deep, heavy sigh, as the inevitable answer forced itself on her mind. It was possible that she might have to live a long time; but not very long, oh, surely not very long!

Jane moved softly about the room, now bright with lamp and fire. Miss Tracy would want her presently; she waited till the call should come; and it did come in a little while. Tracy spoke almost in her natural voice.

"Jane, I want to know everything! When did he die?"

Jane Shaw went quietly to the fire and sat down by her young lady's side. She answered, as she knew it was best to answer, with perfect frankness and simplicity.

"Three days ago. It was in the afternoon; they think it must have been about half-past four."

"Ah!"

Tracy sat upright, and it seemed as if a sudden ray of light illumined her face. Her eyes had a look of bright remembrance. Just for an instant the sharp anguish of separation was deadened; she knew that soul had spoken to soul, his soul to hers, as she had lain between sleeping and waking. It had been no miracle; love had found out its power, and had done its best.

Jane looked at her surprised, and almost awed. There was a moment's silence, and then Tracy spoke again in a quiet tone.

"Go on, Jane. Begin at the beginning, and tell it all right through," she said.

"When Mr. Linn came back from Scotland," Jane began, "he was in excellent spirits, but I did not think, myself, that he looked over well. There was something strained and worn about his face, although he told everybody that he was much better. His holiday was prolonged, miss, as I told you in my letter. He returned just five days ago."

"Yes," said Tracy, listening calmly.

"Three days ago—on the first of September—he got up rather late in the morning, and owned to Mrs. Deale that he felt uncommonly tired. Still, he spoke cheerfully enough, and the old woman—she is getting very old, Miss Tracy—did not think much of what he had said. All day he went in and out as usual; and at a quarter to four Mrs. Deale carried his tea upstairs. She brought in the tray, and set it on the round table in the middle of the room. Mr. Linn was sitting in the arm-chair at his writing-table in the oriel window. Mr. Abbott was there, and they were talking together. A few minutes later she heard Mr. Abbott come downstairs. It was a sultry day; the house was very warm and still, and she believes that she fell asleep in her little parlor."

Jane paused, and cleared her voice. Tracy's eyes, shining steadily, were fixed upon her with a constraining power which compelled her to go on.

"Between seven and eight o'clock Pascoe Rayne went up to the study and found the room nearly dark. Mr. Linn was still sitting at the writing-table; but he had sunk back in the arm-chair as if he had fallen asleep."

"And then?" said Tracy quietly.

"The young fellow found that he was strangely still. He put his hand on the vicar's shoulder, and a dreadful fear came into his mind. There was no sigh, no movement at all. Then he got a light, and saw that Mr. Linn's face was quite colorless, and very, very calm."

Tracy was shivering again, but she was utterly silent, and did not weep. It was Jane who could no longer restrain her tears. Presently her young lady spoke in the same gentle, quiet tone.

"Mr. Abbott was the last person who saw him living, was he not?"

"Yes; the very last."

"What did Pascoe do—afterward?"

"He ran downstairs, and met Mr. Abbott in the hall. The man Jones had just come in, and they sent him for the doctor. And then Pascoe, in his sore distress, rushed out-of-doors, and went to that deformed sister of his to tell her what had happened."

"And that is all, Jane? There is nothing more?"

"Nothing more," Jane repeated in a tired voice. The hardest part of her task was accomplished, and she was beginning to feel the effect of the strain. "Only that Mr. Abbott wants to see you, Miss Tracy, when you can bear to see any one."

"I shall see him to-morrow. You must think of yourself, and rest, dear Jane."

She laid her hand tenderly on the faithful woman's shoulder, and smiled. It was a smile so sad, and yet

so loving and patient, that Jane went quietly away to weep in solitude.

But Tracy did not see Mr. Abbott till several days after her return. She lay, worn out, on her bed, and saw no one but Jane, who waited on her almost in silence.

When the hour of the funeral came, and she knew that the old words were being spoken over Wilmot Linn, she bowed her head, and joined in the service mutely, present at least in spirit. The day was fair and still; above the housetops she could see a calm sky, faintly tinted with blue, and flecked with snowy clouds. He had won peace; a deeper, calmer peace than any which earthly happiness could have given him. Yet all that was good and true in those short months of their happy intercourse would live on. Their love had been of that best and highest kind which alone can stand the test of death.

And then her mind travelled back slowly to the day after grandma's funeral at Ferngate; and she thought of the knitting, and the unfinished row which had been left for her to complete.

There was a work left for her hands to take up, and continue for him. The Home would need all the help that she could give. And, after all, the time was short, and the labor would be sweet and fruitful.

And so the prediction, uttered long ago under the old trees at Woodcourt, had been fulfilled in Tracy's life. "In the day of your great anguish remember the poor gypsy," Esther Lee had said; and the day had verily come. Tracy did remember her, and recalled, too, the parting words of that strange prophecy—"The light will shine again at the close."

CHAPTER XLI.

A MYSTERY.

"Has he told her heaven unites again the links that earth
has broken?

For on earth so much is needed; but in heaven Love is
all."

—A. A. PROCTER.

It was the day after the funeral, and John Abbott was standing in Wilmot Linn's study alone.

The golden afternoon had not yet begun to wane, and even in this dark corner of the city there was a dim glow of light. It seemed to John Abbott as if he were looking at an old sunset as he stood here. He could remember an afternoon years ago, when the light had been like this; and at the thought of Wilmot Linn his image came distinctly back, and seemed to stand in the old place. It was only an instantaneous impression; the vision was in his own mind, and passed away, leaving the empty room with its neat book-shelves and orderly writing-table. And then, chancing to look across to the chimney-piece, his glance rested on the water-color drawing of the empty boat.

As he looked at the picture he caught, for the first time, that subtle hint of an allegory which the artist had expressed; and he wondered that he had never understood the suggestion until this moment. But one of the attributes of true art is unobtrusiveness; its real meaning is often hidden till the time for revelation has come. The heart must undergo a certain discipline before it reads the lesson aright.

Ever afterward Abbott remembered that first half-hour spent alone in Wilmot Linn's room, when Wilmot was gone. The room would be his now; he was here to carry out the last wishes of the dead friend who had left everything in his hands; and now that he found himself again in the old study, he breathed the familiar atmosphere of calm and peace.

The fragrance of a sweet unselfish life was clinging to this place; everything seemed to breathe of Wilmot Linn; the peculiar quietness which had marked all his doings seemed to be lingering behind him. It was so tranquil here that a sense of comfort came creeping into John Abbott's heart unawares. What was this mortal existence? What was time? What was death?

There was no fear in his mind when he opened the drawers of the writing-table. Wilmot Linn had been his guide, his companion, and his own familiar friend; and he knew that he should find nothing that would sully the whiteness of that dear memory. There are lives which look fair enough till death suddenly reveals their secrets; and there are deaths which shed an unexpected glory over misunderstood lives.

He turned over one paper after another, and if a tear fell on these records of the past it was no shame to his manhood. These papers were not very many, nor were they of any great importance. Verses, notes of college lectures, jottings of stray thoughts, and packets of old letters from early friends were among the collection. Presently he came to a large blue envelope, and found inside a bunch of withered violets tied with a piece of purple ribbon. And then he passed his hand across his eyes, and sank back musing into the easy-chair. He was still absorbed in thought when the door opened quietly, and a slender figure, clad in black, glided in.

"Miss Taunton," he said, starting up. "They told me that you were ill."

"But I am better," she answered in her clear, sweet voice. "Did you not wish to see me?"

"I could not expect to see you here. It must have cost you a great effort to come," he replied, placing a chair for her. She threw off her long black cloak, and sat down in silence.

"Don't look so doubtfully at me, Mr. Abbott," she said at last. "I am not so fragile as I seem."

He was indeed looking at her with an intent gaze, and thinking that he had never seen any human being so like a spirit as she was then. He felt the charm of her ethereal grace, and that subtle power of hers which was always so difficult to define.

"Are you not going beyond your strength?" he asked. "Mrs. Shaw told me that you had broken down."

"No," she replied. "I have not broken down. I can bear things which would kill some women. Believe in me, Mr. Abbott, and say all that you have to say."

There was not the least excitement in her manner. She was always gentle, even in moments of enthusiasm; and now, although her paleness was startling, there was nothing strained or unnatural in her tone.

"I do believe in you," he said involuntarily. "But you will have need of all your firmness here. Do you recognize this?"

She put out her hand to take the blue envelope which he was holding toward her. The frail little hand did not tremble, and she took the paper resolutely.

"I do," she answered, with a glance at the faded flowers. "They were the first I ever gave him." Abbott was silent, and she looked up at him suddenly with a faint smile. He could just see the gleam of the gray eyes through the thick black fringes, and felt that a strong will was shining in them.

"Again I must ask you to believe in me," she

said softly. "I have more strength than you are aware of. I think there is something that you want to say."

"There is," he answered, in a grave tone. "But first I must ask you a question. Did you receive a letter from Wilmot Linn, written on the day of his death?" Tracy quivered from head to foot, and the hands which held the blue envelope were trembling now; but her voice was composed when she spoke.

"No; I did not receive any letter."

"Ah!" John Abbott hesitated a moment. "But he had been writing to you, Miss Taunton, just before he died!"

"How do you know?" she asked.

"Because I was the last person who saw him alive. Because I stood here, close to this writing-table, and saw lying upon it, a letter, stamped, and addressed to you. We were talking about parish matters, and he said, quite suddenly, that there would be changes. He did not tell me what those changes would be; but as he spoke I saw him glance at that letter."

"Were there any other letters beside mine?"

"There were three other letters. Two were addressed to clergymen; one to a tradesman. These were found upon this table, just as he had left them, but yours was missing. And something else is missing too."

"What is that?" she asked quickly.

"The only trinket which he possessed; that little ruby cross which hung round his neck when Mr. Lazelle found him. Did he give it to you?"

"No," she answered gently. "No."

"I do not think he would have given it to any one else," said Abbott quietly. "What can have become of it? I have seen it several times; it was always kept in a small cardboard box in this drawer."

He touched the drawer in the writing-table which he had unlocked. The key was in it still,

Tracy was absorbed in thought. The golden light was fading, and changing to gray.

"Are you sure," she said at last, "that no one came into this room after you left it, till Pascoe found him—dead?"

"As sure as it is possible to be," he replied. When I left him, and went out, he was alone in the house with Mrs. Deale, who was dozing in her parlor. Little Hannah, the housemaid, was away; Fordyce was in the country; Pascoe was practising in the church. Mrs. Deale always takes her nap in the afternoon, but she is a light sleeper, and she would have been roused by the opening of the hall door."

"Do you think, then, that he destroyed my letter?" asked Tracy, with a thrill of pain in her voice.

"If he did there are no fragments to be found. And he was not the man to change his intention. He did not tell me what that letter contained; but I believe I know."

"And you believe that—"

"I am sure that he cared for you, Miss Taunton, more than for any one in the world. I feel that you were made for each other. Soul answered to soul; you were his second self; the spiritual half of him. Can one say more than this?"

"No," she answered, "you cannot say more. But I would have given the world to have had my letter."

"Perhaps I may find it yet," he said hopefully. "You know that this room will be mine now. It is as open to you as to me. Come when you will, and let us talk of the things that he would have us do. It will comfort us both to carry out any wish of his."

She rose, and extended her hand with a gentle, grateful gesture.

"How you loved him!" she whispered. "I shall be happy; have no fear for me. It will be a strange kind of happiness, and most people would call it by another name. But I would not exchange it for any joy that is to be found on earth."

She put on her cloak again with that swift gracefulness which characterized all her movements, and gave him a gentle good-by. When she was gone he still stood in the oriel window, and presently he saw the slim black figure going down the garden path below. He passed his hand over his eyes. How brave she was, and, oh, how lonely!

He never thought for a moment of a time when another might step into Wilmot Linn's place in her heart. Although he had not known her long, he yet knew her too well to dream of such a possibility. For himself he was entirely devoted to his work, and perfectly heart-free; and while Tracy Taunton had touched his ideal of all that was high and tender in woman, she was the last he would have sought for a wife. To him she seemed already too near the borders of the unseen world to be drawn back by the clasp of earthly love.

He was busy all through the rest of that day; ransacking the drawers and boxes which contained Wilmot Linn's few possessions; but his patient search was all in vain. Neither the letter nor the ruby cross could anywhere be found.

It was not until the next morning that he mentioned the missing letter and trinket to Pascoe.

The young fellow was looking pitifully ill and worn. His beautiful face, now utterly devoid of color, was more delicate and womanish in its aspect than it had ever been before. He seemed so fragile, and so incapable of bearing the strain of a great sorrow, that John Abbott found it difficult to extract the information which he required. Pascoe appeared almost incapable of collecting his thoughts at all.

"My head gets confused when I try to recall everything," he admitted, putting his slender white fingers up to his forehead. "When I came upstairs, and found him sitting—so silently—in his chair, the room was almost dark. I don't think that I even

glanced at the writing-table. I could think only of him."

"But the cross," said Mr. Abbott. "Can you throw any light upon its disappearance? I found the drawer of the writing-table locked as usual; and I took the key from the pocket of the waistcoat he had been wearing. The little cardboard box was inside the drawer; but it was empty."

"I don't know anything about it," rejoined Pascoe in a weary voice. "I believe he showed it to me once—a long time ago. And I never saw the letter addressed to Miss Taunton. It might have been on the table when I came upstairs, or it might not. I cannot say."

"It must have been there, Pascoe, unless he had destroyed it after I left him. There was hardly time to have destroyed it, I think. Dear fellow! he died about half an hour after my departure if the doctors are right. As I was leaving he complained of being excessively tired, and said that perhaps he might get a few minutes' sleep. When I last looked at him he was leaning back in the chair, inclined for repose. It is not likely that any one came upstairs before you did, is it?"

Pascoe pressed his hands to his throbbing temples. "Oh, my God!" he moaned, "how agonizing all this is!"

"You must not give way," said Mr. Abbott kindly. "Try to pull yourself together. We have all suffered a loss that will never be made up to us in this world. No one realizes this more fully than I do. I would gladly have given my life for his dear life; but it was not to be so. Now let us do all we can to carry out his wishes, and find out what he wanted to have done. I am very much concerned about this missing letter."

"I wish I could find it." Pascoe spoke with his face buried in his hands. "But I cannot."

"Of course you cannot. But you may do something to help me. When one thinks of it the hall door really ought not to be left on the latch. Yet Mrs. Deale must have heard any one who came in."

"She heard me come in," said Pascoe, rising, and beginning to pace the floor with languid strides. "And she always keeps her parlor door open in winter or summer."

"She has quick ears, too," Abbott remarked. "Besides, no one would have gone up to the study and stolen the letter. The idea is preposterous. Yet I can't think how it disappeared."

"It is a mystery," said Pascoe. "Oh, how I wish I had been with him when he died!"

"I have wished that a thousand times already," responded Abbott with a sigh.

Pascoe took another turn, and then sat down again wearily.

"I am glad now that I am going to leave St. Monica's," he said. "How strange that he should have got the new appointment for me just at the last!"

"It will be a great rise for you to be organist of St. Jerome's," Mr. Abbott replied. "But, after all, Pascoe, the West End is not very far from the city. You will come and look us up sometimes."

"Yes, Mr. Abbott, I shall often come. There is no doubt, I suppose, that you will be Mr. Linn's successor?"

"I think there is no doubt," John Abbott answered. "The living is not a valuable one; and his wish will have an influence."

CHAPTER XLII.

TOILING ON.

“Known and unknown, human, divine:
Sweet human hand and lips and eye;
Dear heavenly friend that canst not die,
Mine, mine, forever mine.”

“Strange friend, past, present, and to be;
Loved deeper, darklier understood;
Behold I dream a dream of good,
And mingle all the world with thee.”

—TENNYSON.

SEPTEMBER had glided away, and October was nearly gone. All those who had loved and mourned for Wilmot Linn had quietly returned to their places and their work in the world. They did not forget him; his voice, gentle and calm, often echoed in their ears; his memory had left a fragrance which sweetened their common life.

Up in her lofty studio Tracy toiled early and late, bent on winning the gold that was needed to carry out Wilmot Linn's design. There was no one to whom she could appeal for help. Mr. McDougall might, perhaps, have been moved to give his aid; but he was dead. Wilmot had found him broken in health, and had prolonged his holiday in Scotland that he might spend more time with the invalid. He died soon after he received the news of Mr. Linn's death.

November found John Abbott formally appointed vicar of St. Monica's. In the course of the same month Pascoe Rayne was to go to his new post of organist in a fashionable church at the West End.

And one day Agatha March came to bring Tracy the tidings of her engagement.

"I am very happy, Miss Taunton," she said. "And yet the remembrance of Mr. Linn blends with all the joy, and never dies out of it. You know how he brought us together? Ah, how he loved to see love grow!"

Tracy's face, usually so quiet and pale, was lit up with a faint light.

"If he could speak to us, Agatha," she answered, "he would say as the song says—

"Sing no sad songs for me."

I am glad that his memory brightens your gladness; that is always the best way to be remembered. And Pascoe, I have been wondering what has become of him? He never comes up here to see me now."

Agatha's beautiful face, glowing with happiness, underwent a slight change.

"I suppose he is shy, Miss Taunton," she said. "I asked him why he did not go himself to tell you the news, and he said that he was afraid of being troublesome."

"He ought to know better than that," remarked Tracy, a little hurt.

"Yes, he ought," Agatha confessed. "Sometimes I think he worries himself about poor Marget," she added, knitting her brows thoughtfully.

"I have not encountered Marget lately," said Tracy, with a sudden, penetrating look. "Is there any change in her?"

"She is very strange, Miss Taunton, and seems to hate everybody. Pascoe does not care to talk about her much; but I am sure he frets over her peculiarities. I wanted to be friendly with her, of course; but what can one do when one's well-meant efforts are always repulsed? She is so difficult, you see."

"What can one do indeed," Tracy said, after a

moment's reflection. "If one persevered in being kind it might only irritate her. Certainly she is hard to understand. I hoped our great sorrow might have softened her."

"It has made her more morose, I am afraid," replied Agatha. "It isn't pleasant to think of her as a sister-in-law. But there must be one little drop of bitterness in the cup."

"And the cup is very sweet." Tracy's eyes were bright with sympathy. "Dear Agatha, how glad I am!"

Agatha kissed her gratefully, and went her way. And Tracy, left alone, turned eagerly to her work again.

On the afternoon of the following day she turned her steps to the Clergy House, and went upstairs to the study. John Abbott was there alone, sitting in the old easy-chair by the writing-table, and rose gladly to welcome her. Nothing in the room had been changed; nothing had been taken away. Always living among Wilmot Linn's possessions, always conscious of that undying influence in his life, Mr. Abbott was growing more and more like his dead friend. His manner, naturally grave, had been softened by the touch of sorrow; and to Tracy he was very gentle. Tall, and dignified in bearing, he gave many people an impression of sternness, and had he lived without the daily contact with a perfectly benevolent nature he might have inclined to severity. But Wilmot Linn's companionship had gently worn away the angles of his character; and although he could not acquire that personal magnetism which gave Wilmot his peculiar power over hearts, he could inspire sincere respect and trust.

"I have come to bring some money for the Home fund," said Tracy, putting something into his hand.

"All this!" he exclaimed in surprise. "Are you sure that you don't work too hard?"

"Hard work is the best thing in the world for me,"

she answered. "Lately I have been doing a great deal for illustrated journals, the first-class journals, you know. They pay well."

He looked at her with a kind of sorrowful admiration.

"It is brave in you to remain in your old rooms, and labor on among us," he said after a pause. "I thought at first that you would not be strong enough to stay. And yet I know that you are doing wisely. All the help that you most need will come to you here."

"It does come to me," she returned quietly. "It never fails. I think we are all helped by *his* memory."

"I am sure of it," John Abbott said. "It helps me every day and every hour. A true man never dies. He was so strong, and earnest, and tender, never trifling with himself or with others, the most perfect Great-heart I have ever known. How good it is to have known and loved him!"

"I say so often to myself," she replied in a hushed voice.

She paused, and sank back wearily in the chair, and the light fell softly on her delicate, tired face.

"That letter," John Abbott said abruptly. "It is still a mystery, and it is always on my mind. I have searched everywhere, and questioned every one in the house."

"If I could but have had that!"

She spoke in a low tone; and then suddenly a great wave of anguish seemed to break over her and sweep her composure away.

"Don't mind me—don't!" she said after a moment's struggle. "I do not break down very often; I have so much to do, you know. And things are going on very well indeed. He would have been glad about Agatha and Pascoe."

"Yes," replied John Abbott sadly. "But I *do* mind when I see you suffer; and I feel that the consolation

you ought to have had is withheld. As to Pascoe, I am almost glad that he is going away."

"But you will miss him?" she said.

"I shall miss him; yes," he answered. "But he is strangely unnerved and unsettled; and he seems anxious to leave us. I feel that I don't know him as well as I thought I did."

"It seemed so easy to know him," said Tracy. "He was always so natural and open. But he has not been to see me for a long time, and Agatha told me yesterday that she thought he was troubled about Marget."

"I don't know why he should be troubled about Marget," Mr. Abbott replied. "She is a good musician, able to earn her own living. I have a letter from her, asking to be appointed to the vacant post of organist of St. Monica's."

"She has not even a spark of Pascoe's genius," Tracy remarked. "Her playing is mechanical; but she is perfectly correct, and very painstaking."

"I suppose I must give her the post," said the new vicar thoughtfully. "Anyhow I will think over the matter. One does not know any harm of the poor thing, and she has been industrious."

"Very industrious," rejoined Tracy.

She had spoken from her sense of justice; but there had been something abrupt in the words which had grated upon her as she uttered them. All through her life she had honestly wanted to do the right thing; but she had always had to struggle with her preferences and aversions; they were apt to make her unjust.

As she was coming out of that narrow passage which led from the clergy-house into Cannon Street, she suddenly encountered Marget herself, walking as usual with a music-book under her arm.

The glances of the two women met, and Tracy half stopped, moved by a rush of pity. Marget's face was thinner; her eyelids were swollen as if with much

weeping; she seemed to have shrunk and grown smaller, and her clothes hung loosely. But when Tracy would have spoken a kind word, the old look of bitter malice checked the greeting as it rose to her lips. Marget's nature was not changed; her hatred was implacable.

Tracy went back to her studio all the sadder for that meeting. Here was one of the children of St. Monica's whom Wilmot Linn's loving influence had failed to soften. She could not find any reason for Marget's unconcealed aversion to herself; nor was it worth while to seek for any. Jane Shaw, with her noiseless step, came in to bring the tea-tray, and light the lamps that were placed on the drawing-table. Tracy worked diligently until bedtime now; she seemed to seize every moment, and turn it to account.

"Are you more tired than usual, Miss Tracy?" Jane asked.

"No." She looked up with a smile. "If I am tired the work will rest me. Look at this boy leaning against a post. Isn't he a capital likeness of Ben? My dear old Jane, how good of you to be the mother of four well-made lads! I don't know how I should get on without them."

"They love to be put into your pictures," Jane answered with a little air of maternal pride. "Thank God they're all proper and tall! If I'm wrong I hope I may be forgiven, but I never can abide a crooked body. It always seems to me that it must hold a crooked soul."

The words lingered in Tracy's mind when Jane had left the room, and she was bending over her drawing. Marget Rayne's misshapen figure rose up before her again, and she found herself speculating on the kind of soul imprisoned in that distorted frame. These thoughts disturbed her, and checked the progress of her work.

She threw the pencil down, got up, and began slowly to pace the room—the room which always

seemed so empty now, although not one of its pretty decorations had been removed. There was a deep easy-chair of wickerwork, cushioned and draped with Oriental stuff, in which Wilmot Linn had liked to sit and rest; and on a stand close by was a delicate lilac vase which she used to fill with violets.

How she missed him in moments like these when troubled thoughts impaired her working power! Now and then in the course of life we hear a voice that can still the tempest within us. Surely there was no human voice like his, no other tone so tender and true. Tracy did not dare to begin to weep; it would have been a relief to shed tears; but tears are a luxury that working-women cannot afford.

She went up to the picture of her knight, and stood, as she used to stand years ago, looking earnestly at the calm, grand face. The likeness to that other face, now hidden from her eyes, seemed more striking than ever to-night. Thoughts of all that she had lost, and of all that she had gained, and had yet to gain, came thronging into her mind as she gazed. Her ideal had been made real for her; it was the achievement of a life's success; a rich gift that not even death could take away.

She turned back to her work again with quiet patience, and the figures began to grow under her pencil. But once she paused, and murmured half aloud in the stillness of the room: "If I could but have had my letter!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

WHAT PASCOE TOLD.

“A tide of fierce
Invective seem’d to wait behind her lips,
As waits a river level with the dam
Ready to burst and flood the world with foam.”

—TENNYSON.

“IF I could but have had my letter!”

Sometimes, in the middle of the night, Tracy would wake up from a dream, and fancy that she was clasping her letter at last. And then she would find her hands empty, and the old helpless longing would begin again—that longing which wears out so many hearts, and is at the root of so many nameless maladies. Just to see Wilmot Linn once more, just to know from his very self all which that vanished letter had contained! In spite of prayer, and faith, and patience, this passionate outcry of poor humanity refused to be hushed; it went on within her night after night, and day after day.

A week had gone by since her conversation with John Abbott. Pascoe had already removed most of his belongings to his new lodging in the West End; and every one was talking of Marget as his probable successor as organist of St. Monica’s. Mr. Abbott, however, had not quite decided on her appointment; he wished to be sure that she was duly qualified for the post; and it was understood that she was to take her brother’s place for a time before being engaged permanently.

It was twelve o’clock on a sunshiny morning at the end of November; and Tracy, who had been work-

ing hard after early breakfast, had just risen from her seat. The sunshine tempted her out of doors; she was tired with the long strain of incessant toil, and felt the need of air and exercise.

Going to the door of the studio, she was startled by a quick, eager knock; and in another moment Pascoe Rayne stood before her.

The first thought that flashed into her mind was that something had happened; her second that nothing important could ever happen any more. The one great anguish which had come upon her had done her this kindness, it had made it impossible that she could ever be stricken down again.

"You are come at last, Pascoe," she said, greeting him a little coldly.

"At last, Miss Taunton," he repeated. "No, I won't sit down, thank you. I'd rather stand."

Certainly something had happened, thought Tracy, seating herself with an air of languid expectation. And then as she glanced at the young fellow's wan face a sudden feeling of compassion stirred within her. The noon light fell full upon him, white and ghastly, standing near one of the windows, and looking like the ghost of the beautiful, hopeful Pascoe of a few months ago.

"You are not well," she said kindly. "The excitement of change has been too much for you."

"Not that," he answered. "I am glad to go away from St. Monica's—glad to turn my back on the home in which I have spent so many happy years. I dare say I surprise you," added poor Pascoe with trembling lips. "You will think I am going mad."

"No," Tracy replied quietly. "You are overwrought, that is all. I am very sorry for you."

"Don't be sorry," he went on excitedly. "When you have heard me to the end, my very name will be hateful to you! I ought to have told you sooner; my wretched cowardice struck me dumb!"

A vague glimmer of the revelation that was com-

ing began to dawn upon her intelligence. She sat still, passive, silent, as if she had been turned into stone.

"The letter!" he gasped out, after a moment's pause. "The letter that Mr. Linn wrote to you just before he died! It was Marget who stole it—Marget, my poor, miserable little sister, and I have been hiding the truth for her sake. But the secret was killing me; I could not carry the burden on my conscience any longer. I was never strong, Miss Taunton; and it was awful to deceive everybody—even Agatha."

"Yes," said Tracy, with a terrible calmness; "yes, it must have been awful. But now that you have begun you must go on, you know. How did she do it?"

"She was never quite like other people," he continued piteously. "She idolized Mr. Linn in a mad fashion of her own; and her passion grew into a sort of mania. Indeed, I did all I could to check it; but she would never listen to one word of reason. And when you came she—hated you."

Tracy's pale lips were curved by a bitter little smile.

"Oh, yes," she said, "the hatred was quite evident. But the theft—I want to know about that."

"It must have been about six o'clock, on the day of Mr. Linn's death, when Marget acted on a mad impulse," continued Pascoe, making a strong effort to tell his story clearly. "She had been working herself into a frenzy for hours; and she resolved, all at once, to seek an interview with him, and tell him all her misery. Don't think that I am trying to excuse her folly; I only say that she never was like other girls, that she did not restrain herself."

Tracy moved her head slightly, but did not speak.

"When she reached the clergy-house she tried the inner door softly, and found that it was not bolted; and then she opened it and crept in. Marget can be

as noiseless as a cat when she likes, and she stole up to the study without being heard."

Pascoe did not look at Tracy, yet he knew that her slight frame was quivering like a leaf, and her hands were clasped tightly in her lap.

"You know how she found him," he said tremulously. "God only can tell what evil courage possessed her when she saw the letter addressed to you. I think at that moment she was mad—really mad! She fled from the room, flew downstairs, and escaped without being heard or seen."

Coldly, articulately, came Tracy's next question; a spot of hectic color starting on each pale cheek as she spoke.

"When did she tell you all this?" she demanded.

"On that very evening. I was distracted, and went to her room to tell her the dreadful news. Then I found her lying on the floor and moaning; and when I raised her up, she said: 'I know it, I have seen him—I know it all.'"

"And the letter?" said Tracy, bending forward, a glitter that boded no good coming into her eyes.

"Ah, Miss Taunton, I knew nothing about the letter then! Later on, when Mr. Abbott had been searching, and making inquiries, I asked Marget what had become of it? And she answered me with a burst of rage. She told me that she had stolen it, and destroyed it."

"She destroyed it! And you have dared to come and tell me this!"

Was it really Tracy who stood there, an incarnation of fury, with white face and flashing eyes? She had risen from her seat, and was standing full in the light; her slight figure looked almost tall; her gaze seemed to scorch Pascoe, and he shrank away from her, trembling and pale.

"What was I to do?" he asked plaintively. "I could not carry the dreadful secret any longer. I have been weak, I know. I ought to have spoken

out at once; but poor Marget was always so "strange!" She must have been mad—quite mad."

"Mad!" Tracy repeated scornfully.

"O Miss Taunton, do not be hard on me!" Pascoe lifted his hands imploringly. "Of course you will tell Mr. Abbott—I know how it will end—and she has lost her chance of being organist of St. Monica's. I must provide a home for her elsewhere. But please do not think that I could ever have been false to Mr. Linn, or to you. My life has been one long agony since he died."

"Do you know what was in the letter that she stole? Did she tell you that?" Tracy hissed out the words.

"She never told me what was in the letter," said Pascoe, solemnly. "I would have given anything—anything—if I could have placed it safe in your hands. When I charged her with the theft she owned it in a burst of passion. You may as well reason with a whirlwind as with Marget."

"I shall not give myself the trouble of reasoning with her," replied Tracy, with ineffable scorn. "She is a thief, and she shall have the justice usually meted out to thieves. Have you said all that there is to say?"

He bowed his head resignedly.

"Then you may go," she said, dismissing him with a little wave of the hand. And in another moment she was alone.

Alone? At first it seemed as if the empty room were full of confused noises; and then came silence. Tracy sank into a chair, and hid her face in her hands.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A VICTORY.

“Shalt thou not teach me in that calmer home
The wisdom that I learned so ill in this—
The wisdom which is love—till I become
Thy fit companion in that land of bliss?”

—W. C. BRYANT.

LOOKING back afterward on the experiences of that terrible morning Tracy had a vague remembrance of trying to be composed and take something for luncheon.

She succeeded in hiding her excitement better than she knew. Jane Shaw thought her looking more tired and exhausted than usual; that was all. But to Tracy it seemed as if the whole world must read Pascoe's story written on her face.

When the meal was over she went to her room and bathed her aching forehead with cold water. She meant to go straight to the clergy-house, and tell everything to John Abbott; but she wanted to relate the tale with clearness and precision. How her hands trembled as she tried to fasten her cloak! How drawn and white her face was as it confronted her in the glass! This storm of passion, raging within her, was wearing out the frail body, and destroying the small strength that she possessed. But not for one instant did she waver in her resolution; with all her old power of will she forced the weak hands to do their work, and put on, with even more care than usual, the soft little black bonnet that she always wore.

Her heart began to beat a little more calmly when

she found herself out-of-doors. The fresh air had a soothing influence. It was one of those days of beautiful autumn sunshine which often come to us with the last breath of the year—a day of soft colors and mellow lights, tranquil and hushed and sweet. Even in the turmoil of London Tracy could fancy how calm the hills looked around Ferngate, and how the shadows slept in the garden path of her old home.

The clergy-house was not quite so easily entered nowadays; the new vicar had given orders that the inner door should always be bolted. Mrs. Deale, whose rosy face had shrivelled up like an old apple, appeared at the little window, and admitted Tracy with a ready smile.

"Fine weather for November, Miss Taunton, isn't it?" she said. "But we shall have winter upon us all of a minute; and here we shall be with our coughs and colds and rheumatics, just the same as ever. There's no trusting the pleasant things of this world," added the housekeeper piously, "sunshine least of all."

"That's rather a dismal doctrine, Mrs. Deale," remarked Tracy, as she entered. "Anyhow we will make the most of the brightness while it lasts. Is Mr. Abbott at home?"

"He went out a few minutes ago," the old woman replied. "But he said he should be back soon; and he's always ready for an early cup of tea, Mr. Abbott is. Mr. Linn used to take his tea anywhere between four and five; but the new vicar is a deal more regular in that respect. Dear me, Miss Taunton, it's a changed world since Mr. Linn went out of it! Mr. Abbott is a dear good man, and does his best for everybody; but Mr. Linn could lift you up with a look or a word. It seems to me that if there are any folks that we particularly want to keep with us, the Lord always calls 'em away. It's the everlasting bores and troublers and grumblers that stick to the earth, like limpets to a rock!"

The flood of eloquence ceased as Tracy slowly ascended the dark stairs to the study. She was glad to get out of the sound of the monotonous old voice, telling such commonplace truths as we all know too well.

The easy-chair stood in its old place in front of the writing-table, and she sat down to wait for John Abbott's return.

The quietness here was scarcely broken by the muffled roar of Cannon Street; and sometimes the shrill twitter of sparrows could be heard outside the oriel window. She leaned back in the chair, and looked absently at the books and papers neatly arranged on the table. Wilmot Linn's Bible was there, and the Prayer Book that he had been accustomed to use. She drew the volumes toward her, and turned over the well-worn pages; but the tears did not gather in her eyes, her heart was still so hot with anger that she could not weep. Other books were on the table, too; one or two of his favorite poets had always been given places there; and John Abbott had changed nothing.

Tracy laid down the Bible with a sudden movement of impatience. How was it possible to sit alone in this room without calling up a vision of the thief who had crept in, and stolen her letter in the very presence of the dead? Why did not some mighty force smite Marget at that moment? What help was there in a God who permitted such deeds to be done? Surely He who could send, if he willed, a host of angels, was strangely unmindful of the interests of his children.

And Wilmot Linn? Could his spirit, set free from the bonds of mortality, regard all that once concerned him with indifference? Was it nothing to him now that she was deprived of the very thing that would have given her the best comfort? This silence, this helpless silence, how cruel and hard it was!

There was only one thought which could kindle a

glow of evil pleasure in her heart. It was in her power to take swift and certain vengeance on Marget Rayne; and she would do it.

That vengeance would fall all the heavier on the wretched culprit because it was an unexpected blow. Tracy could read Pascoe's character aright. She was sure that he would not yet dare to tell his sister that he had betrayed her secret. He had rushed out of the studio that morning to hide himself in solitude. The agony of making his confession had left him exhausted in body and tortured in mind. But Tracy could recall the look of misery on his white face without the faintest pang of pity. She could only remember now that he was Marget's brother, and that he had hidden her guilt for three long months.

And Marget, having enjoyed her malice to the full, was waiting contentedly for her appointment as organist of St. Monica's.

The timepiece on the mantel-shelf was ticking the moments away, and John Abbott did not come. Tracy longed, with an intense and cruel longing, to hear his footstep on the stairs. Every minute seemed an hour till her story was told. She knew just how he would look while he was listening to the tale that she had to tell. She could see, in fancy, the stern lines deepening round his mouth, and the grim resolution expressed in every feature of his grave face. John Abbott was a just man and a true. She had no fear that, in this case, he would be over-lenient. No; justice would be done.

Ay, and it should be done for Wilmot Linn's sake as well as hers. The thief had sinned against them both. Tracy did not spring up from her seat as she would have done in the days of her passionate childhood; she sat perfectly still as she pondered over her revenge; but—

“Her eyes were a soul on fire.”

How monotonously the clock ticked on! Her ears were strained to catch the lightest sound of a foot-step; but none came; there was nothing to break the silence of the house in the still hours of the afternoon. Her impatience was becoming intense; this delay seemed to fan the desire of vengeance into a fiercer flame.

Her gaze had been resting absently on a bronze paper-weight upon the table; it was a curiously wrought piece of metal, representing a barred helmet, and she began to wonder vaguely if she had ever noticed it before. Then a very faint breath of chill air passed over her forehead, and she looked up quickly to see whence it came.

"Oh," she said softly, "is it really you?"

Yes; it was Wilmot Linn, standing on the other side of the table, in the soft light that came through the oriel window. He looked at her very quietly, with the steadfast glance that she remembered so well. It was a look of affection and authority that shone out of the deep-set eyes, and on the calm face there was a faint approach to a smile.

"I have suffered—suffered," she said, with a little sob. "Your letter to me—do you know that she stole it?"

He gently bowed his head.

"I have suffered," she repeated, "more than words can say. And now—"

"You must forgive her."

"That is too hard—too hard," she said, clasping her hands. "Have you no feeling for me? Have you no love for me?"

Her voice was low, with a ring of passionate appeal in it.

"I have no love for the evil that is in you." There was not the faintest note of sternness in the quiet tone, but its gentleness was inexorable. "It is your enemy; and I tell you to destroy it before it conquers you. The victory is in your own hands.

If you lose it, you wrong the best and highest part of yourself. Do you not understand this?"

She was silent, but she trembled at the words.

"I have no new commandment to give to you," he went on. "I only remind you that all souls belong to God—even the soul that you hate and despise. It is that hatred that you must crush out of yourself, and overcome by love. There is love enough in your soul to rise and conquer hate if you will but call it up. Fight this good fight; fight it with all your will and all your strength, and you shall do greater things yet. Do you shrink from this conflict? Think that the time is short, and the struggle will last but a very little while."

Her face seemed at that moment to reflect the light on his.

"A little while," she echoed, "a very little while! Yet it seems so tedious to me. To you it is nothing; but tell me—how long must I stay here? When shall I be set free?"

"I cannot tell you; it is not well for you to know. Look up, and work, and be true to yourself; and the hour that you long for will come when you think not."

"And you?"

Unconsciously she stretched out her hands to him with a quiver of entreaty in her voice. Those two short words contained the intense yearning of the spirit in its loneliness; and they were understood and answered.

"When that hour comes you shall see me again."

He had not replied with any responsive gesture. He had stood quietly in the light of the window, but voice and eyes were eloquent with an indescribable tenderness which satisfied her deepest need. In that instant her cup was filled to the brim. She drew a long breath of contentment; then a sigh which seemed to vibrate softly through the room echoed hers; and he was gone.

The afternoon was fading into evening, and yet John Abbott did not come. She looked round the study; the door was closed, every article was in its accustomed place; the olive-green curtains of the oriel-window hung in their usual straight folds. There was no trace of the visitant who had come and talked with her a few moments ago; but he had been here, and she had spoken with him face to face.

According to the generally received notions, she ought to have been frightened or ill. But she was feeling calm and well as she sat in the old arm-chair; there was no fear, and no confusion in her mind at all. It had seemed a perfectly natural thing that Wilmot Linn should come and talk to her. How he had come, and how he had gone, she knew not; nor was she even anxious to know. Had her inner eyes been opened that she could see?

For a few minutes she sat motionless, deeply conscious of an influx of quietness and strength. The sense of peace overflowed the passionate trouble which had brought her here. It seemed to be an easy thing now to forgive that great wrong.

She sat upright, drew pen and ink toward her, and opened a blotting-book which lay upon the table. Then she wrote a few words on a sheet of note-paper.

“MY DEAR MR. ABBOTT:—I hope you will decide on appointing Marget Rayne to the post of organist. She will fill it far better than a stranger; she loves the organ, and knows it as a familiar friend. I feel that Wilmot Linn would approve of her appointment; and no one can wish it more earnestly than I do.

“Ever yours sincerely,
“TRACY TAUNTON.”

She did not fold her note, but left it lying in the open blotting-book, so that John Abbott's eyes might fall upon it as soon as he came in.

With one more glance round the room she went to the door, opened it, and walked quietly downstairs.

Mrs. Deale heard her step, and came out of her little parlor.

"So you're tired of waiting for the vicar, Miss Taunton," she said. "It's a pity that he hasn't come in; and I'm sorry that your time was wasted. Shall I give him a message?"

"No, thank you," Tracy answered cheerfully. "I have written all that I wanted to say. Good-by, Mrs. Deale."

There was still something else to be done. She hurried out into the busy street, looking up to see the last faint glow of gold in the darkening sky above the roofs. The day was dying in peace; scarcely a breath of wind stirred the folds of her black cloak as she crossed the street, and turned her steps in the direction of St. Monica's Home.

Agatha March herself opened the door, and Tracy was instantly struck by the expression of her beautiful face. Something had dimmed the brightness; the rich bloom had paled a little, and the lips were pressed closely together. The old frank joyousness was gone.

"Dear Agatha," Tracy said, "I can see that you are sad."

CHAPTER XLV.

LIFE-WORK.

“God is in all that liberates and lifts,
In all that humbles, sweetens, and consoles.”

—LOWELL.

“Yes, I am a little sad,” admitted Agatha.

She led the way through the narrow passage into the small room in which Tracy had seen her first. As usual there were piles of garments on the table and shelves, for Agatha’s duties had not decreased, and she loved work for its own sake. She took both Tracy’s hands and drew her toward the fire, still holding them.

“You are troubled about Pascoe,” Tracy said; “but the cloud will pass. I have come to set your mind at rest. When did you see him last?”

“He was here last night for a few minutes,” Agatha replied. “And I have never seen him so strange, so unlike himself.”

She smiled faintly, meeting her friend’s kind eyes.

“You think that I fancy things,” she said. “But I am not fanciful. Don’t look at me! I am not pretty to-day; anxiety makes one quite plain.”

“It would take a vast amount of anxiety to make you plain!” Tracy laughed gently as she spoke. “And I must look at you; I have come on purpose to look and talk.”

“Do you know, you look happy, Miss Taunton,” exclaimed Agatha suddenly. “Not excitedly happy; but calmly content, as if you were at peace with all the world.”

"I ought to be at peace," Tracy answered. "I have a deep sense of blessedness. Now let us talk about Pascoe—did he tell you that he was coming to see me?"

"Yes, he said that he should call on you this morning. Did he come?"

"He did."

Agatha bent forward and involuntarily laid her hand on Tracy's arm.

"Is there a secret?" she asked. "If there is, I am sure that it concerns Marget."

"There is a secret, Agatha, and it does concern Marget. Do not seek to know it; don't ask questions of Pascoe. He has been worried and distressed, and it will not do him any good to talk about his trouble. But it will pass away like a cloud."

"Are you certain of that, Miss Taunton?"

"Quite certain. Tell me where he is living now, Agatha. I shall write to him to-night."

"And your letter will comfort him? What a wonderful woman you are! Indeed, Miss Taunton, you are very good."

A shade rested on Tracy's face for an instant; her eyes looked deep and dark in the firelight.

"No," she answered, "I am not good. I want to be—I will try to be. Agatha, you must have patience with Marget; you must remember that she is not like other women who are happy and beautiful, and made to be loved."

"I will remember it," said Agatha, "in days to come." She spoke almost solemnly. It was as if a wave of deep feeling had passed from Tracy's heart to her own. She took a pencil and paper from a drawer in the table, and wrote Pascoe's address.

"Good-by," said Tracy, kissing her. "When you see Pascoe again you will not complain of his depression. I am going now." It was almost dark out-of-doors; but when she entered her studio she

was greeted with warmth and light. It seemed to her, for a moment, as if a familiar figure must be seated in the deep arm-chair, waiting for her coming, and ready to give her a welcome. But, although the room was empty, her heart was full of hope and rest. She sat down to write the letter to Pascoe at once; and when that was done she turned to her drawing-table, and devoted herself to her work. There was no time wasted in reverie; but while she worked her thoughts were busy. Was it in a dream that she had seen Wilmot Linn, and heard him speak? Ah, what did it matter? Spirit had met spirit, whether in the body or out of the body she could not tell.

It was enough for her to know that there had been this meeting for which she had prayed so long. It was enough for her to know that she had his promise of another meeting, which would not be followed by another parting. There would be no excuse for her now if she failed in her task, and allowed herself to be conquered in the fight.

That night she went quietly to sleep, untroubled by any desire for revenge, undisturbed by any searchings of heart.

The morning found her happy and tranquil; and as she sat at breakfast she thought of Pascoe, reading the letter which she had written on the preceding evening. The hours passed quickly; Jane noticed the brightness in her look, and the cheerful ring in her voice. About noon, Agatha made her appearance in the studio.

Her face had recovered all its vanished light and bloom; it glowed in the dark setting of the simple bonnet worn by the children of the Home. The richness of her beauty was so striking that Tracy looked at her for a moment in silent delight.

“Did you expect me?” the girl asked. “Ah, Miss Taunton, you knew that Pascoe would come to me this morning! He is himself again, just the

dear open-hearted Pascoe of old days. And I am so happy."

"It is all well," said Tracy with a smile. "Don't begin to thank me," she added, lifting up a warning hand. "I do not deserve any gratitude. Did he tell you why he was so different?"

"No; he merely said that he had been suffering from a dreadful attack of low spirits. Of course I asked no questions. Marget was the cause of his trouble; I have felt that from the first."

Tracy was silent.

"Do you know, Miss Taunton," Agatha went on, "that Marget will get her heart's desire? She is to be appointed organist of St. Monica's. On his way to me this morning Pascoe met Mr. Abbott, and heard the news from his own lips."

Tracy's eyes were shining with a steady lustre under the thick black fringes. "I am glad," she said simply.

"It is your doing," Agatha exclaimed. "The vicar told Pascoe that a note from you had settled the question. You pity Marget, and you want to make her happy."

"It will be all the better for you and Pascoe if she is happy," said Tracy. "Now I think she will be less dissatisfied and restless. What does Pascoe say?"

"He cannot put his gratitude into words. He said that you were the best friend that he had on earth. Miss Taunton, I must go now; you will not let me express all that I feel, but I know we owe our happiness to you."

Tracy sat quite still for a few minutes after the girl's departure. Everything would be right; Agatha and Pascoe would be happy. This was what Wilmot Linn had wished—what he had intended from the first—when he had brought them together. It was he who had brought them together; and this was the plan he had had in his mind when he had

done it. With that intuition which was one of his best gifts he had seen that they were fit for each other.

If Tracy had carried out her revenge on Marget these two loving young hearts would have been darkened and saddened. One can very seldom punish a sinner without hurting those who stand nearest to him. If only for the sake of Pascoe and Agatha it was right to spare Marget Rayne.

But the desire of vengeance had quite died out of her heart. The conflict within her was ended; it would never have to be fought over again. She could look placidly now at what seemed Marget's triumph and her own defeat.

She could bear to go Sunday after Sunday to the old church, and listen to the music which was awakened by the hands of her enemy. She could encounter Marget in her walks without feeling any anger at the glance of the malicious eyes. She could smile kindly when Marget scowled. Her foe had lost all power to hurt her; it was only while there was wrath and bitterness in her own heart that Marget could do her harm. Nothing in their lives was really changed, and yet everything was different. Tracy had caught so clear a glimpse of the higher destiny that awaited her that the troubles of this present life seemed mere trifles. The hope of rest had become a certainty; there was no more doubt, all was peace.

Sometimes during the winter, when she paused in her life-work, she felt astonished at the progress she had made. The fund in John Abbott's hands was steadily increasing. The new picture, which she was painting for the Royal Academy, bade fair to sustain the high reputation which had been won by the first. Her hands were full; work was pressed on her from all quarters; her strength seemed equal to all that she undertook. In calm of mind, and with a new and tranquil consciousness of power, she was accomplishing the task set before her.

People who belonged to the fashionable world made many attempts to draw her out of her retirement; but Tracy resolutely held herself aloof from society. To live in *Vanity Fair* was to lose one's individuality, and become merged in a mass of dresses and smiles. Moreover, she wanted to live cheaply, to wear plain clothes, and enjoy that perfect freedom from irritating restraint which is so necessary to the steady rise of all artists. The work that she had set herself to do demanded all her energies, all her time, and all her heart.

Books were almost her only luxuries in these days. She enjoyed her walks and omnibus rides to Mudie's, and always contrived that John Abbott should read anything that was particularly striking. The fraternal feeling between the vicar and herself seemed to strengthen as time went on. She helped him in his work more than any one guessed. To her he brought the worries and difficulties inseparable from his life and calling, and found that her counsel and sympathy never failed.

To the children of St. Monica's she was a kind of elder sister, ready to settle disputes and listen to troubles that would have wearied any one less free of heart. She never knew how much was really accomplished at this time, never realized how faithful her service was, nor how rich the harvest would be. She just worked on, trying humbly to complete some of Wilmot Linn's unfinished labor; unconscious how lavishly she gave, how ceaselessly she wrought. And so the months glided away.

CHAPTER XLVI.

GOING TO SANDYSTONE.

“O ye who have your eyeballs vexed and tired,
Feast them upon the wideness of the sea!”

—KEATS.

“So that little Miss Taunton has become quite famous!”

Tracy overheard the sentence, and smiled. She had accompanied Agatha and Pascoe to the Royal Academy; they had gone through the rooms, and were coming out with the crowd. There was a crush and a pause, and all three caught the words. The speaker was a withered old lady with an anxious look about the eyes; and something familiar in her face and voice sent Tracy's thoughts wandering back into the past.

“Miss Taunton!” she heard another feminine voice say. “Did I ever meet her anywhere, I wonder?”

“Perhaps you saw her at Woodcourt, years ago,” the first speaker replied. “There was a little affair between her and Sir Alfred Montjoy before he married Grace. His mother was scarcely civil to the poor girl; it was really too bad, for she was quite an inoffensive little thing.”

“Ah, really! But then, you know, Mrs. Endon, that old Lady Montjoy can be terrific.”

“Yes; I wonder that Grace gets on as well with her as she does. By the way, I must tell Grace to look at that lovely picture; she rather liked Miss Taunton when she met her at the Court.”

The crowd swept on, and Tracy looked at her companion with smiling eyes. It was pleasant to escape from the throng, and come out into the fresh air and sunshine of May.

"Well," said Agatha, turning suddenly to her friend, with a little burst of enthusiasm, "it is a splendid thing to be famous."

"It is a splendid thing to be loved," responded Tracy in her sweet, quiet voice. "Love is the best thing in the world, Agatha; be sure of that."

"The palm stands upright in a world of sand."

Fame often isolates; it often leaves a woman standing alone in a desert which no one cares to cross so as to get quite near to her. When you are happily absorbed in your home-life, dear, you will never give a single envious thought to a celebrity."

Many people glanced, that day, at the young couple who walked side by side. They were so happy and so beautiful together: Pascoe, with his saintly face and large blue eyes; Agatha, wearing her serge uniform as usual, and glowing richly like a rose. Life had given them its choicest gifts; on their faces there rested the glory and bloom of love and youth. And you knew, when you looked at them, that the glory would remain long after the bloom had fled.

Tracy drew a long breath of satisfaction. When she was with these two she felt as if she stood in the midst of a fair garden, and watched the blossoms opening to the sun. They had nearly reached the outer portals of Burlington House when they saw John Abbott advancing with a companion.

"This is a fortunate meeting," the vicar said, greeting Tracy joyfully. "Mr. Kerne wishes to be introduced to you."

Mr. Kerne had his wish, and the introduction took place. He was a tall man, very lean and dark, with an eager, inquiring expression, and a nose that had

a decided touch of the beak. The bright hazel eyes, looking out from under heavy brows, were keen, but frank and kind; they were good eyes, and spoke well for their owner.

"It is a great pleasure to meet you, Miss Taunton," he said. "I have just come home from the wilds, and it does a man good to look at a picture like yours when he has been living the life of a bush-ranger. Abbott and I were boys together."

"And we never expected to see each other again," John Abbott remarked. "Life has been kind to us both."

"I shall turn up at St. Monica's on Sundays," Kerne went on. "People say it's easy to make friends everywhere; but I never felt the need of friendly faces as I did when I landed in England. It's sadder to come back to an old world where all is changed than to go to a new one."

"You will be welcomed in our little corner of the old world," Tracy said kindly. "We have quaint, old-fashioned ways, and cling to old customs still."

Kerne's keen eyes rested on the artist with a depth of approval which Pascoe and Agatha observed. To-day she was looking like the Tracy Taunton of old times. To please the young people who loved her she had laid aside black, and put on one of those soft gray gowns which Wilmot Linn had liked so well. A white frilled kerchief of delicate muslin was knotted at her breast, and fastened loosely with a bunch of violets. Fragile as she was, worn with deep sorrow and incessant labor, the old charm lingered about Tracy still.

Next Sunday found Horace Kerne at St. Monica's, and John Abbott brightened under the influence of his old playfellow. Sometimes Kerne dragged him away from parish work, and took him for a walk through green lanes, talking of old days when they had gone birds'-nesting or nutting together. And Tracy, grateful for all the good that

was done to the over-worked vicar, smiled kindly on Horace Kerne, and allowed him to come, now and then, to the studio.

So the bright summer days stole away, and London began to be slowly emptied of its richest inhabitants. White-faced women faded and fainted in courts and by-streets; pallid children ran about half naked, and clustered in sickly groups round the drinking-fountains; the odors from the fruiterers' and green-grocers' shops were bad to smell. And when July was near its end, Tracy bethought her of an old farm-house scarcely a mile away from the lonely fishing-village of Sandystone.

The Dawleys had sent her the usual summer invitation, but she was not strong enough to bear Laura's prattle now. She could not yet endure the sight of the pretty white room where she had dreamed her last dreams of earthly bliss. No; she must seek fresh scenes, and strengthen herself for the work that she had to do; and those who knew her and loved her best approved of her decision.

It was arranged that she go alone, and that Jane Shaw should follow her later on. And so it came to pass that, after a journey of several weary hours, Tracy found herself resting, one evening, in a long, low room, and looking out through open lattices at a red sunset.

The house stood in a sheltered spot, and the warm slope of the garden came up close to the windows. Sweet old-fashioned perfumes were floating into the room; mint and marjoram, sage and thyme grew and flourished abundantly; narrow paths went winding in and out among gooseberry bushes; flowers bloomed luxuriantly in unexpected spots; and fruit trees started up here and there. It was a garden which seemed to have no beginning and no end. But Tracy was charmed with its pretty confusion, and drank in deep breaths of fresh, scented air as the sun went down.

She went to sleep that night in a bed-chamber that was long and low like the room downstairs. The house was only two stories high; but from the upper windows you commanded a view of blue water shining beyond the green meadows; and it was this first sight of the sea which gladdened Tracy's eyes when she awoke.

She rose refreshed after unbroken sleep, and set out for the shore as soon as breakfast was over, following a narrow footpath across the fields, and coming to a piece of waste land, sandy and barren, where a lonely cottage was standing. A little farther on she came suddenly to the smooth yellow sands, strewn with low rocks, and found the sleepy sea running up quietly, almost to her feet.

Still farther on, and the character of the scene was changed; the water dashed and foamed around the gray and black bowlders, standing up rugged and stern; the coast was wild and grand, and the black-edged rocks cut sharply against a sky of purest blue. Tracy sat down to rest upon a convenient slab of granite; but got up presently to look deep into one of the neighboring rock-pools, where a crimson weed was floating in a bath of clear green. It was beautiful here, yet there was something awful in this loneliness to one who had only just come straight from the heart of a crowd. Never until this moment, perhaps, had she realized how well she loved humanity.

Going back to her slab of granite she sat down again, and gazed far out seaward, thinking of all that had come and gone since she had last looked upon the broad face of ocean and listened to the voice of waves. Suddenly, as she was watching the flash of a gull's white wings, she caught sight of something black bobbing up and down like a cork on the surface of the water, and discovered at last that she was looking at a human head.

So the coast was not quite deserted after all. She

sat and watched, and felt her interest growing in that bold swimmer who seemed to be making for a mere speck of dark rock a long way from the shore. What pluck he had, she thought, to trust himself to the sea with no comrade at hand! Of course such things were done every day, and there was nothing remarkable in the sight of a solitary human being breasting the tide as he was doing then. But sitting there, a lonely spectator of the feat, it began to grow marvellous in her eyes.

Her keen sight enabled her to see that he had gained the rock at last, and was resting on it. Then, after a short interval, he turned shoreward, and she saw him coming in, apparently with strength unabated, toward a nook among the gray boulders. It was now nearly twelve o'clock; the sun was pouring down fiercely on the sands, and Tracy began to think longingly of the mid-day meal and shady rooms at the farm.

She took her way homeward with rather weary feet, and rejoiced silently when the dark-red walls of the old farm-house met her gaze. Her landlady, standing at the kitchen door, beheld her toiling up the slope of the meadow path, and called out to her in a pitying voice:

"You're just dead beat, miss, ain't you? Don't be troubling yourself to go round to the front; come straight across here, and you'll be spared a step or two. Now, why couldn't you bide indoors or in the garden till the cool o' the day?"

"Because I was impatient to get to the sea, Mrs. Bolt," Tracy replied, coming slowly between rows of vegetables to the broad space paved with snow-white stones, outside the back door. "It was very silly of me, I know; but it is such a long time since I have had a glimpse of blue water."

"That's what Londoners always say," said Mrs. Bolt. "I do believe they are all Jack Tars at heart. I don't care much about the sea myself, and my good

man don't either. But our boy Harry would never live on dry land if he could help it. Sit down a minute, miss."

Tracy sank into a rush-bottomed chair, conscious that a string of onions was dangling over her head. Mrs. Bolt sighed, stroked her coarse apron with both her hard-working hands, and went on:

"It's my belief that he'd rather keep company with fishes than human beings. This morning when his father looked for him he was nowhere to be found, but one of the men had seen him going off to the water. Harry-the-Swimmer they calls him——"

A sturdy youth of eighteen, with a red freckled face and coal-black hair, wet and shining, suddenly appeared in the doorway at this moment. At the sight of Tracy he removed his sunburnt straw hat, and made her a very creditable bow.

"So there you be, my lord," said his mother, eyeing him severely. "I know well enough where you've come from. I'd have you understand, sir, that the Almighty never meant you to be wastin' your precious hours in the sea; it's only ships and leviathans and such-like that He hath made to take their pastime therein."

CHAPTER XLVII.

OUT ON THE SANDS.

“The western tide crept up along the sand,
And o'er and o'er the sand,
And round and round the sand,
As far as eye could see.”

—CHARLES KINGSLEY.

TRACY, dreaming away the sultry afternoon in the cool parlor, smiled to herself when she thought of Harry-the-Swimmer. His red face and wet black hair had taken her fancy; his passion for salt water, and his obstinate determination “to take his pastime therein,” amused her very much. In spite of fatigue she was already beginning to enjoy the change of air and scene; and plainly furnished as the farmhouse was, there was no lack of comfort. The sofa on which she lay was so old that it could hardly have sustained the weight of a more substantial person; but it was of a shape that made it a fitting resting-place for weary limbs; and it was supplied with big feather cushions which received the tired head and shoulders in a soft and ample embrace.

It was a house that seemed to be full of sleepy sounds, that came from within and without. Just outside the parlor door an ancient clock ticked loudly and monotonously, and some one in the kitchen was crooning a drowsy song. All kinds of sweet murmurs drifted in from the old garden and the neighboring fields; bird-notes, the hum of insects, the swish of the scythe through the long grass. It was pleasant and shady and calm; and lying there on the sofa she was glad that they had—

“——Opèd the casement to let in
The sun, and that sweet doubtful din
Which droppeth from the grass and bough
Sans wind and bird—none knoweth how—
To cheer her as she lay.”

Two or three days went by before she turned her steps seaward again. Then came a golden afternoon which lured her out to follow the narrow pathway that led across the fields to the shore; and she set off, feeling fresh and strong enough for a longer ramble than she had taken yet.

It was low water now, and the aspect of the scene had changed. There was more of the smooth yellow sand to be seen, and where the tide had been it had left behind a treasure of delicate shells. Long strips of gleaming water lay one beyond the other, separated by ridges of sand. Masses of rock, which had been hidden by the flood, were now left exposed to the sun, draped with green and brown weed. Tracy, with her head bent, walked onward, fascinated by the shells, which tempted her to stoop every minute. At last, standing upright with a strong consciousness of back-ache, she suddenly found herself face to face with Marget Rayne.

The first thing that struck Tracy was the girl's resemblance to a grotesque figure in a child's story-book, where the blues and reds and yellows are laid on with no sparing hand. Marget's hues were “angry and brave,” and strong enough to—

“Bid the rash gazer wipe his eye.

Her prosperity enabled her to indulge her taste for gay colors; but Pascoe's admonitions, and a wholesome fear of Mr. Abbott, kept her plainly clad in St. Monica's. Some one had said that blue would suit her admirably; and here, by the sea, she had donned a bright blue gown besprinkled with red spots. There was a gleam of triumph in her eyes when she confronted Miss Taunton.

"How do you do, Marget?" said Tracy. "It is a surprise to meet you here."

She had fought steadily against her resentment; but she could not speak to this woman without an inward shrinking. Half sadly she felt that her forgiveness was not quite complete.

"I wanted change of air," Marget answered, rather grandly. "Willy Howard will play the organ for three Sundays."

"It is good for you to have a holiday," Tracy forced herself to say kindly. "I see you have been picking up some of these lovely shells."

"I didn't pick them up here. There are better ones yonder," said Marget, pointing across a waste of sand.

"Where?" Tracy asked.

"Out there, close to the queer little rock they call the arm-chair. When you go up to it you can hardly believe that it hasn't been cut out of the stone by men's hands. The best shells are always found just there."

"Do you know Sandystone well?" said Tracy.

"My father used to bring me here, years ago, when he was well off. I was only a child then, but I remember a good deal about the place."

"Your shells are really very beautiful," Tracy remarked, looking into Marget's basket. "Far better than mine."

"There are plenty more where these came from," replied Marget, beginning to move on.

Afterward, when Tracy was walking slowly homeward, she made up her mind to go across the sand next day, and inspect the arm-chair. The shells were beautiful indeed; she meant to bring a basket, and fill it full of sea treasures for the children of St. Monica's Home. Pebbles and shells would help them to spend many a happy winter evening; they would be more valued than costly toys made by human hands. Her mind was so full of the children's pleas-

ure that she almost forgot Marget for a time, and found the walk to the farm shorter than it had been before. There were home letters to be written—a brief account of her doings to be sent to John Abbott—a cheery letter to Jane Shaw, and one to Agatha March. The world was not empty; it was full of warm hearts and helpful hands. After all her anguish, Tracy could lift up her head and say, "I am not lonely." The "blessedness" that had come to her was of a kind that all know, and all can share if they will. Heartsease is a common flower enough, the pity is that many will not stoop low enough to gather it, and so toil on, and miss its healing power.

It was later in the afternoon when she made her third journey to the shore. The weather had grown cooler; the low beams of the sun gave a peaceful look to everything; and she walked quickly along the sands, not stopping to pick up any of the shells that lay at her feet. The arm-chair rock, which Marget had pointed out, could be reached easily enough by an active walker; and she went on and on, never pausing until she had left the shore far behind, and was close to the mass of granite so curiously fashioned by nature into the semblance of a chair.

It was a big, massive chair indeed, furnished with two arms, and a cavity hollowed out between them. The back rose perpendicularly, and was much higher than the seat. All about the base were scattered the beautiful pink and white shells which Tracy coveted; but before she stooped to gather them she walked round to the front of the arm-chair. Somebody was curled up in it in a luxurious attitude of ease, fast asleep. It was Marget.

In silence, with a sudden thrill of pitying kindness, she stood looking at the woman who had done her such a cruel wrong. The helplessness of slumber appealed to her strongly at that moment. It was evident that Marget had succumbed to the spell of

utter weariness; the golden lashes rested on a cheek whose vivid red had faded; the lips were paler than usual; her breathing was regular and quiet. It would be cruel to wake her, Tracy thought. Marget was not strong, the rest would do her good.

She turned away from the sleeper, and set to work to fill her basket with the shells. Then, too, the seaweed began to claim her attention; she paused to spread out a tiny red tree with fairy-like branches, and lost herself in picturing the deep water world where it grew.

The basket was scarcely half filled when she grew tired, and felt that she must sit down and rest. Standing erect, she looked back to the beach that she had left, and then turned cold with a sudden terrible fear. The tide was coming in; it was fast covering the sand-ridges and connecting the strips of water around her; and between her and the strand there was already a shining flood, which rippled under the kiss of the freshening breeze.

It was a beautiful scene, fair with cool sunlit coloring; the wind curled the little waves as they came rolling in, and the air was filled with their low, sweet murmur. But Tracy's heart stood still. A thousand times she had wished for death; but to meet it here, alone, to feel the cold salt water creeping up closer and closer to her lips, this was what she had never dreamed of. And then she suddenly remembered Marget. Was she sleeping still?

Yes; she was curled up in the seat of the rocky chair, and did not appear to have moved hand or foot. Tracy laid her hands upon the girl's shoulders, and shook her gently, crying "Wake, wake!"

Marget's eyes opened slowly, and she looked at Tracy with a bewildered stare.

"Oh, is it you?" she said in a hurried, confused manner. "Where are we? I think I must have fallen asleep. I must be going home now."

"Is there any way of getting home?" Tracy asked,

trying to steady her voice. "Marget, it seems that we are cut off by the tide."

"The tide!" Marget repeated, starting up. "Oh, I remember now. Yes, there's a way back across the sands of course. But what's this?"

She looked about her, still bewildered, pushing her felt hat back from her forehead, and disordering the thick coils of red-gold hair that were wound closely round her head. Her eyes wandered over the ever-widening expanse of bright water, and her brows were knitted with a puzzled air.

"It's so strange," she said. "I've only been asleep a very little while, have I?"

"I am afraid," Tracy answered, "that you have been asleep a long time. I found you sleeping when I came here, and did not wake you."

"You didn't wake me!" Marget's voice rose suddenly to a scream. "Then you wanted to kill me. You let me sleep on that I might be drowned."

She had risen to her feet and was standing on the seat of the chair-rock, staring at the water with dilated eyes, her bosom heaving, her hands clasped convulsively together.

"Drowned!" she repeated. "Yes, that's it; you hate me and want me to die."

"Hush, Marget," said Tracy quietly. "Listen! I want you to live. Try to think, try to be calm; is there no way of escape?"

"You know there is no way," Marget cried furiously. "If you had wanted me to live, why didn't you wake me sooner? You are as bad as a murderer."

Tracy shivered from head to foot at the wild words.

"O Marget!" she said, "I did not know that there was any danger. I never thought about the tide at all. I am not used to the sea. Don't you see that if death comes, it will come to us both?"

"But you are not afraid of death," Marget shrieked.

"I am afraid. I won't die—O God, I won't die! I'm happier now than I was once. I love the organ, and I've got the things that I wanted; and I don't want to leave this world. I won't leave it, I won't be drowned; it's an awful death."

"Oh, hush, Marget." Tracy tried to put her arms round the frantic girl; but Marget savagely repulsed her. The sea was close now, swirling round the base of the rock and crawling over Tracy's feet. She shuddered at its cold touch. And then her thoughts wandered back to that far-off day when she had gone to steal lilies on the lake at Woodcourt; she recalled the first heavy chill of the water, and the sensation of sinking down, down, into its mysterious depths. Ah, what a lifetime she had lived through since that bygone summer day! Her life had seemed short, but it had been full of high thoughts and holy teachings and one golden year had been rich with the sweetest and purest love that earth could give.

"I am afraid to die!" wailed Marget again. "I'm afraid of what may come afterward. O God, do let me stay here in my body—I am fond of my body, and I don't mind its being a little out of shape! O God, do let me stay in my poor little body; don't let the waters drown me—don't let my soul go shivering and shuddering out into nowhere! I'm not fit for heaven, and I *won't* die!"

With the last words her voice rose to a wild scream of despair, as shrill as the cry of a bird—a cry that went ringing far across the sea.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

SAVED.

“Oh sweet and strange it seems to me, that ere this day is done,

The voice that now is speaking may be beyond the sun—
For ever and for ever with those just souls and true—
And what is life that we should moan? Why make we such ado?”

—TENNYSON.

SPENT and breathless with her passionate anguish, Marget leant against the back of the rock chair for support. Tracy, white and calm, fixed her hopeless gaze on the infinite expanse of water, which was now broken into millions of incoming waves by the fresh evening breeze. Faster and faster the tide rolled in, over her ankles, up to her knees, dashing the salt spray into her cold, pale face and chilled and drenched she climbed up into the seat of the chair, and stood by Marget’s side. The girl seemed almost unconscious of her presence now despair had made her mute and still.

“Marget,” Tracy said, speaking close to her ear, “is there no hope that some one may see us, and come to save us?”

“No hope, no hope,” moaned the girl. “Only a few fishermen live up on the cliffs, and no one knows where we are.”

For a few seconds Tracy stood silent; the breeze was driving the tide before it, and blowing their hair about their faces; there was indeed no hope. She put her arm tenderly round the shrinking figure by her

side. Marget did not repulse her now, she nestled closer in the embrace of that kind arm, and through the loud murmur of the sea Tracy could hear her moan feebly. How fast the water rose! Already it was washing over the slab of granite which formed the seat of the chair.

"Marget, can you hear me? I am praying for you with all my heart."

The girl looked up at her with a gleam of hope in her miserable eyes. "Yes," she said, "pray."

The answer came suddenly and swiftly. Again as she had seen it a few days ago, Tracy caught sight of a black head rising and falling on the waves, and making toward them in spite of all resistance. It was a strong swimmer, breasting the tide, cleaving his way through the rolling surge, and drawing ever nearer and nearer to the place where they stood.

"Marget, you will be saved," Tracy cried, lifting her voice high above the noise of the waters. "It is Harry Bolt. You must trust yourself to him."

A few moments more, and the swimmer had reached the spot. He rose out of the water, dripping, and strong as a young sea-god, shook the brine out of his eyes, and spoke, panting:

"I can take one," he gasped. "To Mew Rocks. Safe there."

Mew Rocks, as Marget knew, stood between the chair-rock and the shore, and were above high water. There would be safety indeed if she could be carried through the sea by those strong arms. She trembled like a leaf with impatience, and stretched out one thin hand imploringly to Harry Bolt; but he looked at Tracy.

"No—you!" he said, speaking more clearly now. "I came for you."

"Hush, Marget!"

The girl had begun a wail of anguish, but Tracy silenced her by a look and a touch.

"No, Harry; you must take *her*," she answered calmly. "At once. Lose no time."

"Then you'll be drowned," Harry cried, "before I can get back!"

"Go!" she said, almost sternly. "It must be. Now, Marget, be calm; let him keep your head above water, and trust him entirely. Don't lose your nerve. Remember that this is your only chance."

"But I can't leave you behind, miss," protested Harry. "I can't do it, indeed. I didn't know there were two of you here. It was you I came for."

"Oh, you won't let me die!" shrieked Marget, clinging to her in an agony. "Oh, make him take me! I want to live—I do want to live—I—"

"Hush, Marget, you are wasting your strength," Tracy said, quietly. "He will take you. Harry, you must obey me; she shall be saved; I have said it."

"Then you give your life for hers," he cried, with a sudden burst of indignation.

"Yes; I give it willingly. Always remember that I was willing. Now go—go, Marget, and be brave."

The passionate desire of life lent Marget courage. Once more Harry Bolt glanced up at Tracy, clinging to the back of the granite chair; once more he caught the gleam of her dark-gray eyes, and knew that with her there was no shadow of turning. There was not even a single word of farewell. He struck out boldly toward the Mew Rocks hampered with his helpless burden.

And now that Tracy's hour had come, was she ready to meet it? Yes, already she felt that the worst was past; rough ways and smooth were left behind, and close in front was rest. The waves were washing up higher and higher; the water had risen above her knees. Marget would be saved; that was enough.

She turned her face away from the shore, and

looked out across the open sea. Beyond this rushing, hurrying tide, the ocean lay like a vast sheet of living gold, and the horizon line was lost in light. It recalled to her mind the picture that she had painted and given to Wilmot Linn. Let the floods prevail, let the waves roll over this frail form of hers; and then there would be freedom, and rest.

And Marget would be saved. The meanest creature who owes his safety to us becomes dear to us. In giving up her life for Marget, Tracy had parted with the last shred of ill-will; the girl was dear to her now; the love within her had risen up and conquered hate. As the water rose higher, and the overwrought brain began to lose its grasp on the realities of earth, her last clear thought was Marget.

Suddenly a loud voice broke roughly through the cloud that had gathered over her bewildered senses; strong arms seized her in a rude grasp, tearing away the hands that still clung mechanically to the rock; on all sides, above the rush of the tide, there was a sound of shouting. In the midst of a tumult that seemed partly real and partly unreal, she found herself lifted bodily into a boat. Vaguely, as she closed her eyes, and rested her head on something that was ready for her support, she realized that she, too, was saved. Her sacrifice had not been required of her. They were taking her back to live in the everyday world again.

Afterward, she had a confused remembrance of being carried to the shore, and taken, by rugged ways, into a dark little cottage, scarcely better than a hovel. And there she became conscious that a new voice was speaking, and new hands touching her with gentle care.

"We will get her dry and warm, and then perhaps she will be able to go back to the farm," said the voice. It was sweet and womanly, and fell pleasantly on Tracy's dull ears that evening. But they could not take her home; and the night was spent

wearily in the close bedroom of the fisherman's cottage.

The recollection of three days and three nights succeeding this was clearer in Tracy's mind. She was at the farm again, lying in the long bedroom whose windows afforded a view of the sea. A doctor visited her; Mrs. Bolt was always in and out; every one was tender and kind, and the hours went by in a peaceful hush. One afternoon she woke up from a long sleep, and saw a slender figure sitting in a chair at the foot of the bed.

It was the figure of a girl who might be four or five and twenty; and there was a pretty daintiness about her which charmed the eye at once. She had a gentle, sunshiny face, with a fresh pink tinge on the cheeks, and a quantity of brown hair with plenty of gold in it. She wore a *calicot* gown, pale blue, with little frills; and there was a small bunch of pink roses and forget-me-nots at the neck.

There she sat, quite still, enfolded in afternoon light; and Tracy lay thinking how pretty she was. Presently she looked toward the bed, with a pair of bright brown eyes.

"You have had a beautiful sleep," she said. "It is time for your tea."

As she rose and drew near the pillow there was a question in Tracy's gaze.

"You are wondering who I am, Miss Taunton. My name is Milly Grant, and my father is rector of Sandystone."

"And you have helped to nurse me," said Tracy gratefully.

"Yes; but there was not much to be done. You only needed absolute quiet and care; and even now you mustn't talk a great deal."

"I will promise not to talk a great deal. But I want to know how I was saved?"

"Well, that's soon told," said Milly, considering her patient's face for a moment. "It was Mr.

Kerne who saved you. He was out in a boat with a fisherman, and caught sight of you on the rock."

"And Marget Rayne?" asked Tracy eagerly.

"She is quite safe; she will get strong sooner than you will. We have all been watching over you very anxiously."

Milly spoke with a little tremor in her voice; and Tracy looked at her with a grateful smile.

"I am getting better," she said. "And you and I must always be friends."

The words rose involuntarily to her lips; she had never, even in her girlhood, made many intimate friends; but Milly's tenderness and helpfulness had opened her heart.

"Oh, I am glad!" Milly answered softly. "I was half afraid that you would go back to London and forget me!"

Jane Shaw came down to Sandystone, to find that Tracy's recovery was slow. She was not strong enough to go downstairs for many days. The large chamber, fresh and cool, was brightened by Milly's daily visits; and Tracy soon learned all that there was to know about her new friend.

Milly led the usual life of a country parson's daughter, but she put into it a spirit and a meaning which such lives too often lack. If she sometimes felt her sphere too narrow and dull, she always lived on pleasant terms with her surroundings. There was peace and happiness in the quiet old rectory, where two younger girls were growing up, and modelling themselves on Milly. No tales of being unappreciated and misunderstood were poured into Tracy's ears in those long quiet talks which they had together.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE REWARD OF LOVE.

"I saw that one who lost her love in pain,
Who trod on thorns, who drank the loathsome cup;
The lost in night, in day was found again;
The fallen was lifted up."

—C. ROSSETTI.

IT was a fair morning, Tracy had been allowed to rise earlier than usual, and there was a promise that she might go downstairs to-morrow if she had a good day. She sat by the open casement in an old-fashioned arm-chair, and listened to the sweet country sounds that were wandering in. A book was on her knee; some rosebuds were lying there too, contrasting delicately in their rich pink with the pale lilac of her wrapper. The faint music of the sea, and of the wind murmuring through great trees, came floating over the breath of the fields, and soothed her with a song of peace.

"Miss Tracy," said Jane, entering quietly. "Here's that deformed young woman asking to see you. Shall I let her come in?"

"Yes, Jane, she may come," Tracy answered. "You need not be afraid that she will tire me. I am ever so much better this morning."

Marget came in with a slow step, and a strange resolute look which altered her whole aspect. Her face was pale and set; her eyes were quiet; their old malignant glitter had died out. She took Tracy's hand half hesitatingly, and sat down in silence. The deadly peril from which she had been saved had

wrought a change in the girl, and made her, it seemed, a gentler and simpler creature altogether.

"I would have seen you sooner," she said, after a pause, "but they would not let me in. You were too ill, they told me. Are you sure that you are stronger now?"

"Yes, Marget, much stronger."

"But I mean—strong enough to bear a great surprise?"

The two women looked at each other. Both were white, both were trembling, the rosebuds fell from Tracy's lap to the floor; unnoticed, the book slid after them. For a few seconds there was a deep hush, in which a bird sang out with a wild shrill note. Then at last Marget's question was answered.

"I believe," Tracy said, "that I can bear anything now."

Marget got up, shaking from head to foot, and laid an envelope, sealed with black wax, in Tracy's hand. Her lips parted once or twice before the words would come; and when she spoke her voice was faint, and seemed as if it came from a long way off.

"I worshipped him," she said. "I would have been his slave—I would have done the meanest work—for just one kind word a year. But he gave happiness liberally to all around him; no one ever starved for kind words where he was. He had the power of blessing one with a look; he always knew, as if by instinct, if anybody was hungering for kindness. And this joy continued day after day, and I thought it would go on forever. But you came; and then the whole world seemed to change."

A little sigh escaped Tracy's lips, but she sat quite still.

"Let me hurry over all that followed," Marget went on. "It is enough to say that I suffered horribly. After that day, down by the river, I think I

must have gone mad. My passion grew too strong for me, and mastered me; I could neither eat nor sleep. Things were in this state when he came back from Scotland, and I felt that he was looking forward to your return."

She threw out her hands and wrung them, gasping for breath; and again there was a brief silence.

"Don't look at me!" she said. "All my life I have been different from other people, and something seemed to get into me, and force me to go to the clergy-house that afternoon. Pascoe has told you that I slipped in unheard, and you know how I found—*him*. It was not the first time that I had looked on death, and I knew the truth at once. There came upon me then a dreadful calm and bitterness. I saw the letter addressed to you lying on the table, and I knew that you had won what I had never had. I stole that letter, and then I fled."

Tracy's slender fingers closed tightly round the sealed envelope that she held.

"I told Pascoe that I had burnt it," Marget continued. "But that was a lie. I read it, and every word fell like a drop of molten lead on my heart. It was the worst punishment that could have been inflicted on me. But I dared not destroy it, and so I sealed it up, and put it carefully away. When I was coming here I was afraid to leave it behind, and I brought it with me."

Her voice was getting weaker and weaker. She covered her face with her hands, and fell cowering on her knees at Tracy's feet.

"Even when I had got my appointment I hated you," she said. "I resented your kindness—Pascoe had told me that you knew everything—and I felt that you must loathe me in your heart. But when we stood together on the rock, with the sea coming in upon us, I saw you and myself in a lightning flash. O Miss Tracy, I saw you as you are, and always will be! I, the thief, the liar, the sinner, come

to you, the martyr and saint—I come to tell you that you have conquered me! There was love in your eye when you were willing to give your life for mine. It was the love that won me. It wasn't your life only that you offered me; it was your heart—your very self."

So it always has been and always must be. To love is to save; to love is to see the true value of a soul, and long to lead it out of darkness into light.

To love is to rise supreme above the bigotry, and falsity, and wild passion of a blinded world; and live, within one's own heart, in the kingdom of heaven.

With a murmured word of thankfulness Tracy bent forward and threw her arms round that poor cowering figure at her feet. Then she drew Marget's head upon her breast, and kissed her, not once, but many times; and there was silence.

When Marget was gone, and she was alone once more, she lay back in her chair with closed eyes, clasping the unopened envelope, and feeling the soft breeze blowing on her face through the open window. If we are ever to enjoy a heaven it must begin in us while we are on earth; and in Tracy it had begun.

Some minutes went by before she broke the seal. Within the outside cover lay that letter which had never passed through the post; that letter which Wilmot Linn had written in the last hours of his earthly life. As she unfolded the note-paper, something fell out of it, wrapped lightly in cotton-wool. It was a small gold cross, studded thickly with large rubies.

And then, while the leaves rustled softly outside the latticed window, and summer perfumes filled the cool, quiet room, she read the words that she had longed for, and satisfied the heart's hunger at last.

"**M**Y OWN DEAREST TRACY—I am writing as if you already know all that is in my heart; and yet before you come back to me I must tell you in plain words how well I love you. For years I have lived an incomplete life, and have striven to lose myself and my sense of incompleteness in the lives around me. How far I have succeeded in doing this you have already seen. If by remaining poor I have made any rich, then indeed these years of unacknowledged loneliness have not been spent in vain.

"When you came, I felt that my dream of a perfect union was no idle vision. It is a truth, old as the hills, expressed in many tongues, ancient and modern, that the spirit must wander restless till it finds its mate. With me, this restlessness was hidden from the eyes of the world, and therefore the world has chosen to call me a confirmed celibate. But those who know me best have always known that I was of Charles Kingsley's mind. Do you remember how he makes that honest sinner, Tom Thurnall, declare that, 'of all diabolical dodges for preventing the parsons from seeing who they are, or what human beings are, or what their work in the world is, or anything else, the neatest is the celibacy of the clergy?'

"A single life, like mine, often finds itself entangled in a fine web whose meshes are woven of other people's needs. I found that I could not break the web without causing discomfort and pain, and I went to Scotland to state my case to Mr. McDougall. He has gladly promised me his help; and now I can make a home for you, here, in this dim house behind the church. Will you come to me, Tracy? My darling, my one true love, how bright my dark room grows when I think of you!

"Something may be allowed to a starved man; remember how long I have been starving, and tell me that you will come soon; very, very soon.

"While I write, I am feeling strangely weak and worn; but to be with you will be a delicious rest. There never was such a feeble letter as this; I have utterly failed to express one half of my deep, strong love. But there is one thing that I must say before I end this poor scrawl which tells you so little of the writer. It is this—I love you for all eternity, because my love is not only of the heart but of the soul.

"I send you the only trinket I possess, the ruby cross which hung round my neck when I was found. The kiss, that I have never given you yet, is waiting for you, Tracy. Come quickly, and let me renew my youth; the hours are so long without you; and I suffer until I can call you entirely mine.

"Forever and ever yours,
"WILMOT LINN."

This was the letter that she read; and then her eyes closed again, while she gathered the words into her heart and feasted on their sweetness. Just then she neither knew nor felt anything but the great joy of possessing such a love, a love so much mightier than death. After a little while she began to think of a thousand things that she could have said to only one person, and to remember that the letter had never had an answer. But are there no answers save those that are given in our poor earthly fashion? She lay back on the cushions with crowding thoughts and fancies; and a great light was shining through them all.

There was a happy little party assembled in the parlor next day. John Abbott had come down to Sandystone to stay with Horace Kerne. And while Tracy was talking to her preserver, she gave an occasional glance at Millie Grant, who flitted about the room, pouring out tea, and entertaining the vicar of St. Monica's with a pretty, natural brightness. The grave John thought her adorable.

On the day after that there was another gathering in the large, pleasant old room. At Tracy's request, Milly had to come stay at the farm; and it seemed to these four people as if they were all very old friends. On her part, Tracy found great pleasure in watching the effect of Milly's fascinations, and wondered that Mr. Kerne did not fall a ready victim. But the two men seemed to have exchanged natures; it was Horace Kerne who was grave, even to sadness,

and John Abbott who was enjoying himself with perfect unrestraint.

"What do you think of my new friend?" asked Tracy, when Abbott came to her side for a minute, bringing a cup of tea.

"Of course she is charming," he answered. "That goes without saying. Rather perilously charming," he added in a low voice.

"Yes," said Tracy, with quiet delight, "I thought that you would find her so."

Abbott went back to the little tea-maker, whose table stood near one of the windows. She was dressed in her pale-blue gown tricked out with little frills, and wore a bouquet of pink roses and fern in her bodice. Her hands were busy with an old-fashioned urn which looked something like a sepulchral monument, and was an object of pride to Mrs. Bolt. Other roses, peeping in through the open casement, formed themselves into a background of flowers and light foliage; and John found himself wondering whether she could ever look as pretty again as she did just at that moment? But she looked quite well, and even better, when she sat down in a high-backed chair, and smiled at him over her tea-cup.

"It seems," he said suddenly, "as if all this was too pleasant to be anything but a dream!"

"Then you have not had much pleasantness in your life, I am afraid," she remarked, with a winning little air of sympathy.

"No—when one thinks if it—perhaps not!" he admitted thoughtfully. "I was brought up in a London house, and no one seemed to think it worth while to take me into the country. My rambles with Kerne are among my brightest memories."

"But people ought to have looked after you better when you were a child," she cried, with a womanish outburst of feeling. "It is cruel to keep children pent up in bricks and mortar! Why were they so unkind?"

"I don't suppose they meant to be unkind," he replied. "But they never gave much special thought to me. My parents died when I was very small, and I was left a good deal to the care of men. They were city men, always engrossed with business, and they could scarcely be expected to take much notice of a boy."

"Oh!" she said, "they must have been brutes! Why didn't some woman see you and understand your needs? What is the use of women if they don't go about in the world looking up the desolate little ones who can't help themselves? A woman ought to know by instinct when a child wants her care."

John found himself watching her with intense interest and appreciation. Her pretty brown eyes were dim with unshed tears; the frills and flowers on her bosom were stirred by her quick breathing. She was—he repeated it slowly to himself—adorable!

CHAPTER L.

TWO LOVES.

“An answer, not that you long for,
But diviner, will come one day.”

—A. A. PROCTER.

“No, Mr. Kerne, it can never be.”

The four who had been so happy in the old farmhouse at Sandystone, were in London now. Milly had returned with Tracy to her City home, and was being instructed by John Abbott in all the ways and ins and outs of his crowded parish. September was drawing to a close, and the evenings were growing misty again. It was in the gray time, between the lights, that Tracy and Horace Kerne were talking alone in the studio.

“Never?” he asked sadly. “O Tracy—may I call you Tracy?—I hoped that you would let me guard the treasure I had saved. I even persuaded myself that you must be meant for me. Can you not care for me just a little?”

“I care for you more than a little,” she answered with a tender tone in her voice. “But—don’t you know that mine is a feeble hold on life which may be loosed at any moment? Down there in the country the doctor told me the truth.”

“Yes, in any moment of sudden excitement or pain you may—be in danger; he replied, looking at her delicate face with yearning eyes. “But you may stay with us—God grant it!—for years. And if you are always watched over, always protected, the peril will not be so great. Tracy, listen to me!”

"I will listen when you do not ask for impossible things," she said, with a gentle little smile. "Even if I were a stronger woman I should still cling to my lonely life. But I am not strong; and so you must be always kind to me, and let me call you one of my best friends. By and by, when you have been longer in England, you will see some one else who——"

He stopped her with a slight shake of the head.

"We won't talk about by and by," she went on quickly. "We will talk about Milly and John. Isn't it delightful to see that dear old fellow plunging headlong into love without a struggle? I had not hoped for anything so good to happen to him. As to Milly, she is the sweetest thing that ever was made!"

Horace Kerne's face brightened. "Yes," he answered, "it is one of those happy bits of life that one seldom sees. John deserves his joy; he had a dreary boyhood. Somehow, it seemed as if he was always overlooked, and forgotten altogether."

"Milly thinks him the first man in the world," said Tracy, with a glad look shining in her eyes. "I don't know how to enjoy it all enough. He has not yet spoken quite plainly to her, I believe; but I shouldn't be surprised if he did it this very day. I wish he would propose to her here—in my studio! He shall have plenty of opportunities. Don't you think I should have shone as a scheming Belgravian mother, Mr. Kerne?"

He was looking at her intently, scarcely hearing her words, engrossed by the thought of all that she might be to him. He had allowed himself, unwisely, to cherish the hope that he might win her some day, although her manner had been far too calm in its friendliness to encourage the delusion. Good old John, absorbed in his own affair, had never thought of warning his friend of the hopelessness of this dream of his. In truth John Abbott, knowing the untold history of Tracy's life, forgot that there were

other men who could not know it, and took it for granted that Horace Kerne would be satisfied with her friendship.

It was a relief to her when the door opened, and Milly, a fresher flower than is often seen blooming in London, came in. Her entrance was the signal for Kerne's departure. He went sadly down the long stairs, and out into the bustling street. Close to St. Monica's church he came across Abbott, and the two men turned their steps to the clergy-house together.

The new vicar was happier than he had ever been before in all his life, for love had entered that life at last. There was no need that he should have been desolate so long, since there were many pretty and charming women who would have been glad to comfort him, and who indeed had manifested their kindly inclinations when they found an opportunity. His big, imposing figure, his somewhat stern face, and his grave manner, made him an object of interest, although he had never been aware of the fact. While Wilmot Linn lived he had scarcely been conscious of his loneliness, for Wilmot's wealthy nature enriched all the lives around him, and Abbott had lived nearer to him than any one. But, just when he was feeling that the clergy-house was a gloomy abode—just when Fordyce was growing more absent in mind, and Mrs. Deale more feeble in body—just after Pascoe had gone away—he chanced to meet Milly.

"John," said Horace Kerne, glancing at his watch, "we have half an hour before dinner. Come up into the study at once; I have something to say to you."

Abbott assented.

They went upstairs; and when they got inside the study Horace closed the door.

"What is the matter?" the vicar asked anxiously.

"I have proposed to Tracy Taunton," said Horace, standing with his back to the empty fireplace. "And she has refused me."

John started visibly. "Yes," he said in a low voice, "Yes; of course she has refused you."

"Heaven only knows what you mean when you say 'of course'!" exclaimed Kerne irritably. "I am a rich man; I can give her care and luxury, and I love her as I never loved woman before. Is there any reason why I should fail to win her?"

John paused. As he stood in the oriel window he looked large and stern; the shadowy light seemed to deepen the intensity of his expression.

"There is a reason," he answered gravely. "I wish I had told you sooner, but I did not see what was coming. Wilmot Linn loved her, and would have married her if he had lived. And she will never love any one else."

There was a pause again in which Kerne simply stood and looked at his friend.

"Then I have no living rival?" he said at last.

"Don't talk so, Horace," John exclaimed suddenly. "Don't talk of rivals in this room where he died! They were as one, those two, and they will be one hereafter. She waits until her call comes, and her heart is set on carrying on the work that was dear to him. My dear fellow, don't speak again of marrying her! Be her friend—she likes you, I know—but give up the idea of love."

"It isn't easy to give up the idea when a man has taken it into his head. *You* would not find it so, John, although you are so ready to give advice," said Kerne, with a bitterness not strictly just.

Abbott was deeply moved. In the light of his own lonely past he saw with sad clearness that Horace had suffered, and would suffer acutely. Beside his newly found happiness Kerne's disappointment looked all the darker. Yet what could be said?

"It won't be easy to give up the idea. I know, too well, that it will be terribly hard," he answered slowly. "I wish with all my heart, old man, that I had told you her story sooner."

"I wish you had," replied Kerne quietly. "But I'm not sure that it would have made any difference. My hour was come, I suppose."

"It generally does come at last," John remarked.

"I've had a hard, rough life," said Kerne. "I've worked away out there with all my might."

He spoke as if he had earned the right to obtain any prize on which his heart was set. It was, perhaps, a natural feeling; but John knew that Horace had enjoyed the hardness and roughness of his life, and that hard work was a necessity to a man of his active temperament.

"You are not the man to let any trouble make a wreck of you, Horace," he said.

"No," Kerne answered, "I'm not such a fool. But just at this moment I'm feeling as if I'd worked for nothing. What is money good for, if it can only buy the things that one doesn't particularly care to have?"

"It can buy the things that other people care to have," said John significantly. "The very things that a great many can't possibly go on living without."

"You are thinking of your charities, old man. The parson in you has spoken." Horace gave a rather bitter little laugh.

Abbott was silent; but his eyes sought Kerne's changing face.

"What about the work that *she* takes an interest in?" Kerne went on abruptly. "Something that her heart is set on carrying on?"

John told him about St. Monica's Home in a few words. He did not try to make his story interesting; he gave a plain statement of facts. But while Horace listened there was a subtle change in his dark, eager face. John knew that his friend was quieted and softened; he knew, too, that Tracy would be vexed with his vain importunity no more.

"Well, old man," said Horace, when he had fin-

ished, "you have given a new direction to my thoughts."

He took out a cigar, and deliberately proceeded to hold a match to it, but his hand was not as steady as usual.

"How dark it grows!" he said. "I shall go back to the hotel, and think everything over. She has given me a headache, John, and a heart-ache. It strikes me that I should like to retaliate by doing her a good turn."

"It would be rather fine in you if you did. But then, Horace, you are always rather fine."

"Bosh, old man!" said Kerne scornfully.

"I used to think so," persisted John, "years ago, when you were kind to a certain poor little beggar, you know. Depend upon it, something good for yourself will come out of this headache and heart-ache. Not the kind of good that you wanted; but a much better kind."

"John, you don't think that she and I are fitted for each other?" said Horace, with a keen, questioning glance.

"No, I don't. If it had been possible for her to take you there would have been mutual disappointment. So you are off? Well, look in early to-morrow."

CHAPTER LI.

PEACE.

“Then through the outer darkness burdensome
I hear again the tender voice that calls,
‘Follow me hither, follow, rise, and come.’ ”

—C. ROSSETTI.

A WEEK later it was made known that Horace Kerne was going back to Melbourne. There was no sentimental parting with Tracy. He listened to her farewell words, and even saw the tears gather in her eyes, without moving a muscle of his face. He said good-by quite simply, refrained from pressing the slender fingers that rested passively in his, and marched resolutely to the door. Then he looked back for one second. And no one ever knew how vivid an impression was stamped upon his memory in that swift flash of time.

To the last day of his life he would remember how she looked, as she stood near the easel, and how the light fell softly on her pale face and wistful eyes. She liked him and was sorry for him; that was all.

“If I had had even the shadow of a reason for staying,” he said to himself, “I would never have gone away. But a man who could misunderstand her must be a fool. With me it must be all or nothing. She could give me—just a little—and I have chosen nothing.”

There was no particular trace of pain on his features when he entered the study at the clergy-house. Abbott, who was waiting for him dejectedly, gave him an anxious glance of scrutiny.

"Is it all over, Horace?" he asked. "And you did not tell her what you have been doing?"

"It is all over, and I have told her nothing. I don't want her to know anything till I'm miles away. Do you suppose I want thanks, or any nonsense of that kind?"

The vicar made an uneasy movement. "You don't realize what a fine thing you have done," he said sadly.

"It's not particularly fine," Horace replied in a matter-of-fact tone. "I had a thousand or two that I could spare. It is not a case of the widow's mite; there's no need for me to go without gloves, or smoke fewer cigars. John!"

"Yes, Horace."

"It's astonishing how this woman has influenced me."

Abbott said simply that it was.

"I'm determined that this affair shan't make me gloomy or fierce," Kerne went on after a brief silence. "It's nobody's fault, old man. And if what I have done will give her rest—let her feel that there is no more need for working so terribly hard—then I know you'll all bless me for it."

"We shall all bless you; there's no doubt of that," John answered heartily. "I wish you would stay with us."

"It seems to me that the only decent end to this matter is to go as quickly as possible," rejoined Horace desperately. "If I stayed, I might be fool enough to go over the old ground again, and make myself a nuisance."

In a few minutes more he was gone.

Not until the next day did John venture to tell Tracy that Kerne had bought the premises adjoining St. Monica's Home. The work that she had been laboring to complete was taken out of her hands; she might pause now, and have leisure to get strong.

Abbott thought that she received the news very

quietly; but when he looked into her face he saw the light of a great joy in her eyes. She was trembling, and her cheeks flushed and paled. Milly, who was in the studio, came at once to her side.

"Go and lie down, and think it all over, Tracy," she said tenderly. "Begin your rest to-day."

"I think I will go to my room for a little while," Tracy replied. "Make John stay here and talk to you."

John was by no means unwilling to stay, although half the parish was wanting him. Milly, in a soft bronze gown, was pretty enough to make a man forget a thousand duties. Her brown hair was loose and soft about her brow, and coiled in thick twists at the back of her small head. Her cheeks, fresh and dimpled, had not lost their apple-blossom tint in London air. John looked at her, and felt that it really was not safe to go near her, unless he had made up his mind to speak plainly at once.

"Miss Grant," he said, "these good-byes are among the saddest things in life. I—I—don't want any more of them. Parting with Horace Kerne has cut me up a good deal."

He paused; and his grave face showed traces of feeling. As he stood near one of the windows, he looked so tall, and massive, and helpless, that the little woman became suddenly conscious of her own mighty strength.

"I am so sorry for you," she said softly. "You do look very sad. We will try to comfort you."

"Promise not to leave me," said John, in desperation. "If I have to part with you I know I can't stand it. The clergy-house is getting awfully dreary. If you won't come to me, Milly, how shall I face my life?"

"But I will come to you," Milly answered. She spoke the sentence with her head on his broad shoulder, but she never knew exactly how she came to be in his arms. Nor could she have told the pre-

cise moment when he began to kiss her. But she dimly remembered afterward that his kisses were many, and his words few.

"If we could but be married before the winter sets in!" said John.

"Mamma won't hear of it till the spring," sighed Milly.

"I shall try to soften your father's heart. He will feel for me, Milly. And Tracy must talk to your mother. A man can't go on enduring things indefinitely," added John, a little vaguely. "I was getting helpless with misery."

"You did look very helpless, dear; I was compelled to come to your aid," said Milly, with a sweet little air of protection. The top of her small brown head did not reach his shoulder.

Tracy agreed with John in thinking that it was a mistake to postpone happiness. She roused herself, and wrote a moving letter, which brought Mrs. Grant up to London; and when she had got Milly's mother into her power, the game was fairly in her own hands. People might say, if they liked, that it was an absurdly short courtship; but John and his stanch ally protested stoutly against delay.

Early in November John went down to Sandystone to be married; Tracy did not feel strong enough to undertake the journey, and was not present at the wedding. But it was her face which greeted the bride and bridegroom when they came back to the clergy-house, and her hands had been busy there.

She had been very happy while she was occupied in brightening the dim rooms with artistic touches. It did not seem sad or strange that another woman would be mistress of the home that was to have been her own. It gladdened her to feel that a full, warm life would be lived here; a life sweet with healthy common joys, and everyday interests. John would be happy in the good, old-fashioned, natural way; nor could she desire anything better for him

than this. As to Milly, she was born to be the light of some one's home.

The next event was the marriage of Agatha and Pascoe in the early spring. The old church was fair with Easter blossoms; and Agatha, dressed simply in white, wore a wreath of natural flowers which Tracy's hands had made. It was an ideal wedding; the bride and bridegroom were both so young and so beautiful that they seemed to belong to some Arcadia of the past, rather than to this dim city of to-day.

The summer days came; but Laura and her sister did not meet. Tracy decided not to go far from London, and spent a month with Mrs. Willwood in the shady house by the river. Then she came back to her studio, and busied herself with her work again; but the need for excessive toil was over, and she had more time now to give to her friends. They were with her very often. Milly came to see her every day; the girls from the Home ran in and out, and talked about the new wing which was to be opened at the close of the year. She took a keen interest in the furnishing of the new rooms, and helped the matron in making arrangements. Agatha Rayne, too, was a frequent visitor, and clung with never-failing love to the place in which she had spent her girlhood.

Perhaps it was because they were all so busy, and so happy in their business, that this year seemed to fly so fast. When they found the autumn stealing away they could hardly realize that winter was close upon them. It was a perfect autumn; balmy, and sweet, and still,

"I think," said John Abbott in a satisfied tone, "that we shall be ready to open the new wing on All Saints' Day. And there is no doubt that we shall get one of the princesses to come."

When that day dawned, bright and peaceful as any of the days that had gone before it, Tracy rose and

looked eagerly out upon the busy world. It seemed to wear a welcoming look that morning; her heart went out to all those hurrying crowds that passed along the streets. She was greeted with a breath of fragrance as she entered the studio, and found her table covered with violets.

"The girls have been here, Miss Tracy," said Jane, "and they have brought these flowers for you to wear in honor of the day."

She had scarcely finished breakfast when John Abbott came in, less tranquil than usual, and full of glad anticipation. "I hope everything will go off well," he said. "There seems to be nothing forgotten. The princess is to arrive at three, you know. What do you think of the weather?"

"Oh, there is not a doubt about the weather," Tracy replied. "It was never more settled than it is now"

"Never," said John, going to the window. "Only Milly has been pretending to perceive a rainy smell in the air."

"It is very wicked of her," Tracy laughed. "Don't let her tease you, John. There will be no rain to-day."

"You must wear your violets," he said, looking at her with critical eyes. "And your new gray gown and bonnet. When I write to Horace I want to tell him that we all thought of him, and that you were at your very best. That will be quite true, won't it, Tracy?"

"Yes, John," she answered, "quite true."

"I hope," he said after a little pause, "that Wilmot knows what we are doing to-day. All the time that I have been planning everything his face has been before my eyes. I think, somehow, that he must see that we have done our best."

He saw her lips part, but no sound came from them. Then she met his gaze, and smiled brightly.

The next to come in was Milly. It was two o'clock

when she appeared in the studio, her face fresh and flower-like, her brown eyes sparkling.

"My dear Tracy, are you ready?" she said. "There is only an hour; we ought to take our places. Are you tired, darling?"

As she asked the last question her face and voice changed. She put her hand on her friend's shoulder, and regarded her with an anxious glance.

"It is only fatigue," Tracy replied. "Don't wait for me, dear. I will lie down on the couch for a little while."

As she went toward the sofa she moved very slowly, and then sank down upon the cushions with a faint sigh of weariness.

"I thought I should have been stronger," she said. "You must go without me, Milly. But tell the girls that I have put on my new gown, and I am wearing their violets. Open the window, dear—this window near me; it is very warm to-day. I shall hear the people shout when the princess comes."

Milly kissed her and departed.

Lying there in quietness, Tracy looked up at a white cloud which sailed slowly above the roof of the opposite buildings. The day was as calm as summer, the air sweet and soft as it came in through the open window; and the room was filled with the scent of violets. She wore some of the flowers on her breast; a large cluster was held loosely in her hands. She lay at ease and listened; the clocks clanged out the hour of three; and presently, above the ceaseless roar of the street, there rose the great shout of the people, telling her that the princess had come.

The sound died away, and it seemed as if all other sounds died with it. Was the room fading, or was it this soft, bright cloud that was spreading slowly round her, which hid familiar things from her tired eyes. Did she speak words, or only dream that she spoke them? There was no one near to hear what was uttered or sighed in the quiet room; but some-

thing within her said softly, "You are here at last!"

"Miss Tracy!"

The voices came ringing gayly up the dim stairs that led to the studio. The girls from the Home, followed by Milly and Agatha, were coming to tell her that the great event of the day was over. One little maid of ten, who had always been a pet of hers, was the first to enter the room, and run joyfully to the side of the couch. But she stepped back quickly, and turned to the others with her finger lifted.

"Hush," she whispered, "hush! She is fast asleep."

Milly Abbott advanced with a quiet step, and a look of solemn expectation in her eyes. She bent over her friend, lying there tranquilly in the light of the golden afternoon, and tenderly touched the pale forehead with her lips. There was no movement, no sigh. A faint breeze wandered in, and gently stirred the violets resting in the soft folds of the gray dress; and she saw that death had left on that beloved face the smile of an everlasting peace.

THE END.

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